WHOSE FAULT?

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

PZ7

Chap. ..... Copyright No. .....

Shelf .I.585W

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

PZ7
.T585
W

Copyright,
E. P. DUTTON & CO.,
1890.

Press of J. J. Little & Co.,
Astor Place, New York.

To My Father,

TO WHOSE STEADFAST EXAMPLE AND FAITHFUL CARE I OWE MY LOVE FOR THE CHURCH,

I Dedicate this Little Story.

WHOSE FAULT?

I.

THERE had been, it appeared, a little discussion of some vital topic; the glow of earnest feeling was yet warm upon the fair faces as each lady pursued her special occupation, and a little ripple of trouble seemed to linger, ruffling the pleasant home atmosphere.

Then, suddenly, soothingly, across it all fell the sound of the Church bell, which seemed to ring "Peace! Peace!" to each vexed heart.

"Come, girls," said an elderly lady rising and dropping certain womanly implements into a well-filled work-basket which stood by her.

"Oh mother, I don't see how I can go! All my unfinished work will be staring me in the face, and spoil my prayers. There is my practicing, and—"

"Never mind, my daughter; everything will be done the better afterward." Then she rested one

hand on the full work-basket and added: "Years ago when you were all children and my hands were very full of work, I used to wonder if saints could ever be made from tired, hard-working mothers! And it was this very day, with its lessons, which helped me to an understanding of many of the vexed questions of a woman's life. I want you all to come and receive that comfort and counsel which the Church offers women to-day."

The young girl who had spoken sighed softly as she laid away her crayons and folded her easel. Then, seeing that the other sisters had gone out, she looked at her mother, with a little smile.

"I think if Trudie were a Churchwoman, they would not find so many little imperfections in her character! I hope there will be a lesson of womanly tenderness for them to-day!"

"There will be something for each one of us, my child, if we only have willing hearts to realize it."

It was a pretty sight to see this mother with her daughters! There were four of them: and her proud, sweet mother-face in the midst of the little group told plainly that in this case God's holy chrism of motherhood had fallen upon one who would never dishonor it.

The two who walked one on either side of the mother, were the youngest and the eldest—the girl

who yet needed so much of the motherly counsel and care, and the young widow whose pale, pathetic face seemed ever looking backward upon blissful days that had ended all too suddenly.

The other two were on all ordinary occasions sufficient for each other. They had their little secrets, their romances, their pretty hopes,—which they liked best to whisper together.

So, through the keen March air, these women went on together while the bell struck its steady sound of "Peace! Peace!" through the din and confusion of the great city.

The mother was right. They found there, in the sanctuary, that comfort and help which was needed. The words of the First Lesson fell upon their hearts with assurance of peace to still all doubt and vexation:—

"Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee; neither search the things that are above thy strength, but what is commanded thee, think thereupon with reverence, for it is not needful for thee to see with thine eyes the things that are in secret."

Ah, what rest!—just to do "what is commanded." Not to worry nor be fretted, nor to seek the how and the wherefore of any troublesome thing. God sets the work; He knows; He commands;

the mysteries are His. Do the little day-by-day duties, all will be worked into the glorious pattern somehow. You cannot tell how, but with God nothing shall be impossible.

"It is essentially the woman's day—the mother's day," said the gray-haired clergyman glancing over the faces of many a loving Mary, and many a weary discouraged Martha. "Come now and sit by the side of the lowly Virgin. See how meekly, how trustfully she receives the wondrous message, sent through the Angel Gabriel. Wondrous indeed! The maiden in her low estate can scarcely realize it. She is 'troubled.' Across the fair dreams of her betrothed girlhood comes the brightness of an honor which dazzles her with its high and holy mystery. Only one little question comes from the trembling and astonished heart: 'How shall this be?' And then, at the angel's assurance that all is well, since she has 'found favor with God, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow' her, she bows reverently, without further effort at understanding, and accepts the gracious dignity which has for evermore made a pure woman the highest of all God's human creatures: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord!'"

How the sweet peace falling as it were from the thought of that highly-favored woman, (by

whose side every other true and lowly woman may kneel, waiting for what shall be revealed,) seemed to calm away all the roughness of impatience, the fretting angles and corners of daily life, the unrest and the longing, and the ever-unanswered "Why? Why?"—that sharp monotone which strikes so often across the sweet melody of life with jarring discord!

Yes, it was the woman's day, and each of these women found her God-sent word of comfort, kneeling there by that pure Virgin's side.

Into the pale face of the young widow there had come a deep peace; and her hand lay in God's, who was leading her by ways of which she knew not.

Even the youngest daughter (who since closing her school-books had turned a page of life which contained many a more vexing problem) felt her troubled spirit grow calm, and all the little worries swept away by the touch of that gracious Hand, the power of the highest overshadowing her, as it had overshadowed that lowly one who was "blessed among women" long years before.

The world wore a different aspect as the mother and daughters went forth from the quiet of the holy house.

They did not speak much; but the little trouble

had cleared from each fair brow, and curves of tender feeling were upon the womanly lips.

Rica smiled eloquently into her elder sisters' faces, and said in a low voice, "I wish Trudie had been with us in there!"

"There she is now! Ask her home to dinner, darling."

Ah! then Rica knew that the little ripple of trouble was indeed smoothed away for the time being and she stepped gladly forward to follow her sister's counsel.

It was a young lady of her own age whom she went to meet; one who seemed scarcely out of girlhood, whose face was full of life's sunshine, and whose voice touched the clear, high tones of joy with a ring of fearless assurance. Listening to her, one could not help asking: "Could she ever attain to that full compass of soul music which strikes melody from the deep notes of woe, and sweetly mingles the varied sounds from life's many vibrating strings? Perhaps. It does not appear so now. All things seem attuned to that one light key of joy—joy!

"Why, Rica! Well met! Where have you been?

"Where I wished for you to be with me. But I will tell you of it by and by; you are to come

home with us please. I was bidden to ask you."

"Thank you, I never can say no; you might as well place honeysuckle near the bees and expect them to refuse to taste."

She laughed gaily; but as they paused at the home door and the others came up, she went forward with prompt respect to offer her hand to the mother and the elder daughters.

The gracious motherly way and the busy, bright household had been familiar to Gertrude Preston since she and Rica had graduated together, coming home with white-ribboned "Diplomas" and certain vague aspirations towards a woman's "higher life."

They had all grown to love her. She was like a humming-bird in the stately quiet home, dipping here and there with her dainty plumage and her sweet low voice.

From sharing Rica's work and all her interests, she had come by degrees to share in the family work and pleasures, almost as one of them.

"It is a mutual blessing," Rica used to say. "Trude needs us to teach her the practical meaning of life, and the use of money; and we need her to lighten our dull hours, and to cut up the ruts

of our daily routine with the wheels of her fairy chariot!"

It was only when there seemed a possibility that Gertrude might become more than the pleasant friend and companion that a little shadow fell across the sunlight.

Elwood Everson was the one brother among these four sisters, and the love and devotion which would have been divided in ordinary fashion among three or four was centred with romantic strength upon this only one. He was their hero; the household oracle; the one man who stood above all doubting, beyond all criticism, in the glorified atmosphere of perfect manhood.

Elwood Everson was truly a worthy subject for all this feminine admiration. He was a thorough man: than which no higher word of praise can be offered one of his sex.

He was the eldest of the family of children who had grown up in the stately old-fashioned home of Doctor Everson. From boyhood he had possessed those traits which so endear a man to female hearts: that watchful attention to the wants of those about him; the unobtrusive effort, the considerate care in small matters, the graceful courtesy, the delicate discrimination,—all attended by true manly dignity.

When Gertrude Preston fluttered for the first time one bright day into the quiet home, Elwood smiled indulgently at the pretty girl-stranger, never dreaming how the sweet light of her presence would come to touch and thrill the deep still places of his being. Almost before he himself was aware of this, his sisters had discovered it, and discoursed upon it to one another.

Rica was certainly beyond expression delighted at the intimation. Gertrude was her friend, her special companion: and that she should have become so much to Elwood was a thought of great joy to the young sister.

To the others it was not a matter of any special pleasure. Of course they loved "Trudie;" she was a sort of pet among them. But that Elwood, —their grand, dignified brother—should have found in her that which his high nature demanded was not an unshadowed delight to them. They had never thought much about Elwood's marriage: it had not seemed a very probable thing, with this grave calm man who had found for so long his pleasure in their society among the quiet home surroundings.

It scarcely appeared—when they thought of it—that the woman lived who was quite "good enough" for this brother. That this pretty but-

terfly of a creature should flutter into his heart and nestle there to stay,—why, they smiled, half-vexed at the thought !

They had been talking of her to-day : not allowing themselves to use her name in connection with Elwood's ; but speaking critically of certain things—as had never before been their wont.

Hence the slight ripple of the fair home atmosphere which the Church bell had smoothed away.

II.

"MOTHER, I will take Trudie to my room for a while, please."

"Yes, my dear."

It was not modern American, that this young lady, this daughter who was "of age," should respectfully inquire if it were her mother's pleasure, before she took her friend to her room. Quite out of date really, and savoring of the rigid laws which sounded from Sinai so many years ago. Still these Eversons were old-fashioned people and retained some possibly obsolete habits.

"Ah, I have found you out! It is 'The Church,' again!" said Gertrude, with a soft laugh as she discovered Rica's Prayer Book and Hymnal for the first time.

"Yes, Trude: it was the Church; and I did so wish that you were with us! It was so helpful; I feel as if all life's snarls were now straightened out!"

Gertrude smiled rather incredulously: but she said, "Tell me about it, Rica. What day is it?"

"The feast of the Annunciation. Dr. Dorman spoke of it as specially 'the woman's day'; and the Lessons were so beautiful! Do you know, I like the old style of reckoning when the 'Year of our Lord' was made to begin with this Festival of the Annunciation on March 25th. It seems to me that this is really the beginning to all Christians. Dr. Dorman said something of this sort—'When I look down the grand cathedral of the ages, glowing with its memorial windows, it always seems to me as if this one stands at the head—this sweet, tender picture of the Virgin listening to Gabriel's wonderful message!' I wish the Church had kept this as its beginning."

"Then you do admit that the Church might possibly be bettered in some respects?" said Gertrude, with a mischievous smile while yet her eyes rested admiringly upon the earnest face of her young friend.

"The Church is not perfect; a Church militant cannot be; but this is only a personal liking, you know."

"Yes, I know, Rica. I can always tell when you have had some special up-lifting through your Church services, and sometimes I wish that

my own lot had been cast in there with you."

"Oh, I wish so, Trude. We all wish it. But—" she added with a slight hesitation, "one may be engrafted, you know: one is not always born to the best estate."

"And what would my 'most-straitest-sect-of-a-Presbyterian' sister say to such a perversion?" she asked, while a little conscious color crept into her cheeks, as if the possibility of such a thing was not altogether a new thought to her mind.

Would she then be willing to accept with Elwood's love his Church also? thought Rica, watching the play of tender feeling upon the girl's pretty face.

"Oh, Trude, she would like anything that you like."

"I am not so sure of that, my dear, but come, I must not hinder you. Isn't there practicing or something?"

"Yes, I do want to practice a little, Trude."

They went down-stairs together. The curtains were drawn aside in the pleasant old-fashioned parlor, letting in the full light of the fast-fading day.

Rica sat at her instrument, playing over and over difficult and intricate passages, while Ger-

trude took a low seat near the window, and drew forth some bit of dainty work.

The mother and the elder daughters came and went as was their wont, pausing now and then to say a kindly word to either girl—and all was informal and delightful.

Some tender teaching of the day seemed to linger in the hearts of the women; and their sweet low voices and gentle ways told plainly that they had,—at least for the present—set aside "the things that were too hard for them," and that they were only going step by step as a wiser Hand led them and the "power of the Highest" overshadowed them.

Perhaps that was why they each had some call to leave the room shortly after greeting their brother, and that they were neither fretted nor vexed at seeing him seated very close to Gertrude, as the waning light compelled her to fold away her work.

It was "too hard" for them! They would leave it to the power of the Highest,—that gracious Will which overshadowed them all.

Rica played on—only changing her difficult passages of study for soft, sweet, dreamy strains which were appropriate to the hour.

Something strangely moved the girl in the win-

dow-seat—either the murmuring music, or the twilight stillness, or the presence of the strong, quiet man so near her.

She seemed not to have ready her usual sparkling speeches, her merry raillery; neither could she flit away, and dart here and there with the soft blithe motions that were peculiar to her.

Her small hands were tightly clasped as they lay in her lap; her lips had a slight quiver whenever she essayed one of her customary lively remarks.

She wished the dinner bell would ring. She heard Mrs. Richards, the widowed daughter, singing softly in the room above. Why did she not come down?

Was there coming a crisis which would change all the old pleasant relations, and set things in a new light? Was her "second home" about to be spoiled for her?

What was this calm, grave man at her side that he should move her thus? Was she not going out that very evening, under the escort of a bright young gentleman, who was always devoted to her? Why were not her thoughts dwelling upon him, instead of fluttering about this man who was ten years older and very much less gay and witty?

Why had she almost forgotten her engagement, sitting so quietly there in the twilight?

Before Gertrude could answer these questions to her own satisfaction, the deep musical voice at her side said, "It is very pleasant to me to find you here, Miss Gertrude."

It was different altogether in tone and in manner from the pretty compliments which she was accustomed to hear, yet there was something in the little sentence so quietly spoken that thrilled her with a strange, deep joy.

There was a sweet ring in her voice as she answered lightly, "Thank you, Mr. Everson, you like to see the little butterfly about among your precious home-flowers, then? That is very kind. It is to me like being in some stately, rich old garden of whose beauties I never tire, and where I find such shady rest and wondrous perfume—melody too," she added, waving her hand with a bright grace toward Rica at the piano.

"May none of it ever fail you, Gertrude! May it only grow better and sweeter to you as the days go on!" He bent over her as she sat: his low, deep tones held a wondrous sweetness, uttering her Christian name, and his breath stirred the waves of her hair.

Does he know how she longs oftentimes for a

place of perfect rest and trust?—how the bright heart wearies of its fluttering here and there, and yearns for one tender abiding-place?—how the smiling eyes and the merry-speaking lips hold—far back from sight—the loyalty of a true and loving womanhood?

Very few knew it. Can it be that this bright bird—whose gay notes and brilliancy all are pleased to welcome—will at last content herself with the shelter of that grave, still heart?

The girl lifted her eyes involuntarily to thank him for his kind wish. As they drooped beneath the unspoken revelation of his gaze, his hand reached down and folded hers in its strong firm clasp.

The dinner bell rang through the silence. Why must life's common-places ever cross, at inopportune moments, the sweet delights of our higher natures?

Mrs. Everson entered the room with her gently-spoken "Are you here, children?"

And her son said to the one whose hand was yet in his, "Excuse me; I will go to my mother."

Dropping her hand with a tenderness that was like a caress he went quickly forward and offered his arm to his mother.

It had been his habit for years. He knew that

she liked this old-time grace and courtesy, and he meant that she should never miss it while he was living in the house.

"Yes, mother, here we are, in the twilight," replied Rica to her mother's question. "And I believe I have played Trudie and Elwood to sleep," she added, lightly laughing. But as she so spoke, she passed to Gertrude's side and touched her lips gently to the blushing cheek.

A pleasant rejoinder from the brother and the mingling of light words as they all gathered in the dining-room set Gertrude more at her ease.

She scarcely dared meet the gaze of those earnest, grave eyes at the head of the table. She had seen in them a token of some strange, sweet reality which might come into her hitherto gay and careless life. Was she prepared to meet it?

"Rica," she said, recovering presently somewhat of her usual bright manner, "what do you think I have done? Forgotten entirely in the delights of your presence, and your home, and your music, an engagement for this evening at Mrs. De Lancey's."

They all laughed. Elwood said in his quiet sincere way,—"If you are in a hurry, Miss Gertrude, we can go immediately. Mother will excuse us, I

am sure,"—constituting himself her guardian on the homeward walk, as he usually did.

"Oh no, thank you! It will be rude enough to run away directly after dinner. I trust you will pardon me, Mrs. Everson," she said in her simple pretty way, turning to the elderly lady.

It was not that she really felt any restraint in that easy pleasant household. It was rather that she had learned there those little ways of deference, those graceful acts and words of courtesy which make life at home so beautiful a thing. She might, like Rica, run in and out, at her pleasure, but she would not neglect the word of apology, the gracious regret, or the genial acknowledgment.

"Certainly, my child, that is all right; Elwood will take you home whenever you wish it."

Rica felt a thrill of delight at her mother's words. If mother were on her side, that was a strong argument which the sisters could scarcely resist.

"Who is to be your escort to-night, Trudie? I suppose I may ask."

"Oh yes. I am going with Mr. George Græme."

The girls went up-stairs together. Gertrude put on her bonnet with a matter-of-fact air, as if there were no special thought in her heart regarding the

brother who waited below, to accompany her home, and Rica hovered about her with a torrent of words, caresses and questions of no special import.

Trudie dear, how is it you accept that young Græme as an escort so much? You don't care for him, do you?"

"Don't I? The Græmes! Ah, the Græmes! A grand old family, you know, Rica!

> "'Arouse thee from thy moody dream!
> I'll give thy harp heroic theme,
> And warm thee with a noble name;—
> Pour forth the glory of the Græme!'"

Elwood heard the little quotation so merrily sung in the sweet soft voice as he passed down the stairs. He smiled; not with any masculine self-assurance, but with simple pleasure at the girlish light-heartedness which held, he knew, such deep, true feeling under its surface sparkle.

"She shall have fair opportunity now," he said to himself, "since she knows something of how much she is to me. I will not trouble her again, until she has had time to question her own heart. If to-night young Græme's ardor and sprightliness seem better to her than my old-fashioned ways, then she shall have free choice. If, after proving all the others, my bonnie bird comes

back to me, she shall find a warm place in which to nestle."

With this resolve Elwood Everson went to accompany their young visitor home.

The short walk was a very quiet one on this occasion. He had intended that Gertrude should feel free to speak her usual bright and happy words, but somehow there had fallen a hush upon her gay spirit as her hand rested on his arm, and she said very little. Perhaps her thoughts were wandering to that young man who bore the "famous old name."

As they drew near the house, Elwood said, "Will you let me come to see you to-morrow evening, Miss Gertrude?"

She consented, without looking into his face, and he went homeward, counting the hours which must pass ere he should see her again.

III.

"IS that you, Trudie?" called a sleepy voice.

"Yes, Sylvie, and the door is barred and bolted, and Gyp is on guard; so sleep in peace. Good morning!"

"The dear girl! How happy she is!" said the sister, smiling as she listened to the light tread in the adjoining room.

"Perhaps she has settled it with young Græme," her husband wickedly suggested, thereby at once putting an end to all his wife's peaceful slumber, and rousing her to excited debate.

Meanwhile, in her own dainty room stood the girl whose future they were discussing—beautiful and bright as though the hour had been ten P. M. instead of two A. M.

A rare bouquet was in her hands; and she proceeded to arrange it loosely in a wide vase, upon a bracket, where it might have the benefit of the cool night air.

Gertrude Preston never wasted nor neglected a flower. It was not in her nature to do so. All sweet bright things were precious to her. Sometimes she had visions and dreams of a pretty home in the cool green country, far away from the noise and confinement of the city, where she could cultivate and tend her own little garden, adorning her rooms with its blossoms, and making them bright for—the husband, whoever he might be whom God should give her. The greater number of Gertrude's friends knew nothing of these pretty dreams and tender ambitions: nothing of the strong, deep nature which gave them birth, and held them so quietly hidden away. By most people, Miss Preston was regarded as a charming butterfly of a creature, who enjoyed life's gayeties to the fullest extent, but had not much care or thought beyond present delights.

The Eversons—who had known her long, and in whose home she had felt a sweet sense of freedom from all formal restraint—understood her better, and realized something of the true worth of the jewel which attracted so many by its surface sparkle. Even to them, there were qualities unknown, rare depths unsounded, and certain intricate windings in the woman-nature which troubled them somewhat on occasions, and which

even baffled their love, and brought a cloud across their intercourse.

It was pretty to see Gertrude's face as she handled first the flowers and then her own girlish adornments. One by one the dainty jewels were removed and placed in their own proper cases,—and all the while there rested upon her fair face the soft flicker of a happy heart light. She was thinking apparently of something pleasant.

The flush deepened upon her cheeks now and then, and a tenderness that was almost tearful came to her eyes. It had been a happy evening to her. Nothing of defined or specially-worded sweetness could she remember; nothing to which she had been compelled to make reply; nothing which inspired her to look about her and make choice or comparison; only a calm, deep assurance that some one (and he the noblest of all men whom she had ever known) held her close in the strong fortress of his love, and that there she might rest forever if so she willed.

He had not said it; and yet all that evening, between the light words of George Græme's talk, his gracious compliments and delicate attentions, she heard again and again those few utterances of the deep, manly voice—"May none of it ever

fail you, Gertrude! May it only grow better and sweeter to you, as the days go on!"

It was not much; but the touch of the strong hand and the look in the eyes which had followed it told a wondrously sweet story to the young heart.

All that evening—through the lights and the smiles of many faces—she seemed ever to feel those deep, true eyes, as they had looked down upon her in the twilight.

How strange it was! She seemed to be walking in the midst of a great multitude, seeing and hearing only that one. She listened and made answer to many people, yet she heard but one voice, and that his.

She understood why he had not come to the little gathering himself that evening, although Mr. De Lancey was an old and intimate friend. The Eversons never appeared at any such gatherings during Lent. As Rica had said to her that evening, "the De Lanceys are not as particular about such things as we are."

She wondered why there should be such differences between Church people. Why, if the Church system was good, did not all follow it alike? She forgot for the moment how many

differences of opinion and of action there were among her own Presbyterians.

While she stood among the flowers of the conservatory thinking of this, she was joined by Mr. Græme, who brought her an ice.

He smiled when, in reply to his question, she told him of what she had been thinking.

"Do you know, Miss Preston, speaking of the Eversons, that I am always impressed with the idea that Mr. Everson stands in the relation of a guardian to you, and that he has an eye upon us younger men, to see if we take proper care of you; and," he added mentally, looking earnestly into her face, "that some day I must go to him to ask permission to say a certain thing to you."

He saw the color deepen in her cheek; and thought for an instant that he had offended her, but her sunny smile flashed out directly, and she replied pleasantly—"That is only because I have been at Mr. Everson's so much. It has been a sort of second home to me. You know I used to go home with Rica in vacation time, when we were at school together, because my sister was travelling. They were all so kind, and made me one of them so cordially, that I always feel quite at home there."

"Ah yes! Probably that is it; and a very charming family it must be to make one of. One rarely meets with such genuine home life as that of the Everson household; such whole-hearted hospitality; such real warmth; as if they had time for true living and friendship—which most American people have not."

His words struck Gertrude as being very true. She smiled thoughtfully.

"Not time enough to live real lives, nor to cultivate true friendships," she repeated. "Is it purely American, this?"

"It is essentially American, I think, Miss Preston. Money and society are, I think, the two idols upon whose altars many an American home is offered a sacrifice."

"Alas, that it should be so!" said the girl thoughtfully, and there was a light of enthusiasm kindled in her face the next instant, which seemed to say, "I should like to set up one sweet home altar which should never be so wrecked!"

The young man noticed her look. He was almost tempted to say, then and there, "Will you join hands with me, to show the world around us a better way, a household life of love and holy single-heartedness?"

With a strong effort he held the impulse in

abeyance, saying only, "It remains for the new home-makers—our contemporaries, yours and mine —(you and me, if you please) to take the lead in a truer, better way. But will the generation prove itself brave enough? The counter-current is very strong; fashion, and society, and worldliness draw with great power. But we are growing very serious, you and I, Miss Preston, for party-goers," he added, with a smile.

"Nevertheless, it is very pleasant, Mr. Græme," she replied, moving forward to mingle with the company—still with that sweet, thoughtful look upon her face which held a hidden meaning he could not fathom.

She had been just her own bright self when he had accompanied her home. And George Græme felt that this fair, womanly girl was a great deal to him; that he knew more of her inner life than many who enjoyed her smiles and pleasant words. Was this, however, any token of her preference? or was it only a result of his interest in her, which had led him to speak to her of more serious things than were current society talk? He could not answer this question to his own satisfaction. Therefore he resolved to wait yet awhile and trouble not the sweet serenity of her intercourse with him.

So he watched her bright face, as it passed from him that night; he noted how she cared for the flowers he had given her, and he was well content.

In happy ignorance of the feelings in George Græme's heart, Gertrude lingered over her late preparations for retiring ; always with that unconscious half-smile which told the sweet inner secret.

George Græme had been a long-tried friend to her. She looked upon him almost as a kind brother, to whom she might turn in any emergency, and whose company was always calmly agreeable ; neither wearying nor exciting. Now, if the thought of him stayed with her at all, it was only in the remembrance of what he had spoken of Mr. Everson. "A sort of guardian!" she smiled ; and, for a moment stayed her hand in its arrangement of George Græme's flowers ; the hand which had felt that strong tender touch, just for one blissful moment. Ah, what a guardianship that would be! How her whole life seemed to sink into glad rest at the thought! He was so wise, so true, so noble—and he cared so for her! She scarcely needed the assurance,—the revelation which he was coming the next evening to make. And yet, how sweet it would be to listen!

The remembrance of that deep, tender voice

thrilled her. Why, how she had grown to care for this man! Almost unconsciously her bright nature had leaned toward his calm, earnest manhood, intertwining, until——

She tried to shut out the bright visions, and to find her old, free-hearted, girlish sleep, but she could not! The time had gone by, and when her sister looked into her face the next morning, she knew that "something had come to Gertrude:" that the door was about to close upon that gay girl-life, and womanhood's strange, responsible realm to open to the untried heart.

"Well, Trudie," spake the genial brother-in-law, looking up from his second cup, and noticing also the new light in her face, "you had a pleasant time, of course, and if you'll allow me to venture a guess, I shall say that you have decided to make young Græme a happy man."

There was an honest warmth in his manner, which saved his words from the censure of abruptness or of frivolity.

Gertrude knew and loved her brother-in-law, therefore she felt no offense at his remark. But her eyes widened with a sudden surprise, as she answered thoughtfully, "Why, Stewart, you know George Græme is only a kind friend to me—more of a brother than anything else."

"And is that what makes the sunshine in your eyes, after your late hours, little sister?"

"Never mind," put in Sylvie. "Trudie will tell us everything, all in good time. Give her some breakfast first."

And so the meal passed pleasantly, as meals usually did in that little household. Gertrude told all about the party: who were there, etc., etc., in her own cheery, merry way.

By and by, when Stewart had kissed wife and baby, lighted his cigar and gone, the girl followed her sister with the newly-awakened question on her lips, and a little trouble in the clear eyes.

"Sylvie, you don't really think—you and Stewart—that I have given Mr. Græme any cause to—to— It is such a mean, cruel thing to do; such an unwomanly way!"

The tears sprang to her eyes at the thought of wrong done in that way to the noble young man who had been such a good friend to her.

"Why no, Trudie! We know nothing about it, except that George Græme has been very attentive and kind to you; and you know what the result of such friendship often is, dear. I have never seen anything in your actions toward him to warrant any great expectations on his part.

Only—men will take things for granted, sometimes."

"Mr. Græme is not such a man I am sure. I don't believe he has any thought of me, except as a friend; as the associate of some bright and pleasant evening talks!"

"Very likely, Trudie dear. And Stewart was only a little on the wrong track," she added, with a questioning smile into her sister's flushed face. "Don't fret, for a minute, child. We know you would never act wrongly, in the slightest way, towards any man."

"Why, I would not give George Græme any pain—would not hurt his feelings so for anything in the world!"

Nevertheless, all unconsciously she did so pain him. She never knew it. It was part of George Græme's life discipline: and he bore it manfully, coming through the fire purified and made fitter for his work in the world.

IV.

THE good brother and sister were a little surprised when Mr. Everson was announced, that evening.

He had not been a frequent visitor at their home, and his sister Frederica used to say that she visited for the whole family. Indeed the intimacy had never extended to Mr. and Mrs. Yates; although on the other side, Gertrude was at home with all the members of the Everson family.

Even on this occasion, when the inquiry had been for "Miss Preston"—and Gertrude had answered the summons without much delay—her brother and sister supposed there was only "some message" from Rica, or some plan in which "Trude" was to be included, in the kindly Everson way.

So, one read his evening paper, in an undisturbed way, and the other made her good-night visit to the nursery, enjoying the sleepy prattle of the little one, all unconscious of the momentous

question which was being asked and answered in the parlor, whither Gertrude had gone!

His offering of flowers revealed itself before she drew the curtain at the doorway. He had always liked to see her enjoyment of flowers. Her eyes, her smile, the very caress of her fingers, as she touched them, told how she delighted in them more than the most effusive words could have expressed.

"They always make me so glad," she said softly, as he watched her bending over his gift. "They seem to tell me that the world is very good and very true, notwithstanding all the dark things which have been said about it."

Her soft laugh rippled like music on the air.

"Gertrude," he said, "you are very bright, very happy: are you not?"

"Yes, indeed! Why not?"

For a moment, he paused. Was he right? Was there that in his own nature which could respond to this brightness; that which could give nourishment and room to this gladness, and not check nor dull it?

At least, the yearning in him was very great, and would not be restrained.

He went and stood by her, as she lingered over the flowers.

"You see, I am like the honey-bees—loath to leave my sweets," she said, smiling up at him, but instantly dropping her eyes at his eager gaze.

"Gertrude, would you think me very selfish, if I asked you to come to me, with your brightness and gladness—to come and fill my life with the sweetness of your song, of your presence and love? Could you? Would it seem a dull task? Would you fear to place your joyous life by the side of mine, so quiet and staid?"

She paused an instant; then moved close to him without a word—so close that the bright waves of her hair touched his arm, as he stood looking down at her.

It was a pretty answer to his question. His heart throbbed joyfully. He put his arm about her, drawing closer still the unresisting form.

"Gertrude, my bright bird, I love you very dearly. Will you give into my keeping the gladness and the beauty of your life? Will you be my wife?"

"It is the best thing in all the world," she whispered; nestling with a feeling of perfect rest in his strong embrace.

Then he led her to a seat, and told her the whole sweet story of his love. He learned some-

thing, too, of how much he was to her: as much as her shy nature would reveal. And these two were very, very happy.

By and by, as the hour grew late, and the husband and wife began to wonder what discussion was going on in the parlor, Mr. Everson's knock was heard at their open door, and his voice asking permission to enter.

Gertrude's hand was in his arm; and a light which could not be mistaken shone in both faces.

He went forward, in his own dignified way, and stood before the young wife.

"Mrs. Yates, I have come to ask you to give me your sister. I will devote my life to her, to cherish her, and make her happy. I know what loving guardians you and your husband have been to her; and I shall try very hard that she may miss nothing of the tenderness and care which you have given."

There was a gracious manliness in his words and manner which could not fail to impress them favorably.

The tears sprang to the loving sister's eyes, as she looked from Mr. Everson to Gertrude's blushing face, half hidden upon his shoulder.

Then she rose, and held out her hand with a cordial smile.

"You have taken me quite by surprise, I confess, Mr. Everson. But I assure you, I know of no one to whom I could more gladly give up my sister."

While she was kissing Gertrude, and both were trying to hide their feelings and their loving, womanly tears, Mr. Everson turned to the brother-in-law, and received his hearty congratulations and good-will.

"Trudie has been a dear, bright, little sister; she will make a good wife, I am sure."

"The dear old brother, thank you," cried Gertrude, moving over to hug him.

Then, after a few more kind words and assurances, Gertrude saw her betrothed depart, coming back with a radiant face which could not but allay any doubt in the hearts of her sister and brother.

"Why, Trudie, you little witch," began Mr. Yates, to cover his wife's agitation, as Gertrude sat down at her sister's feet, and rested her head in her lap, "you have completely surprised us. Who would have given you credit for so much trickery! Here have I been getting myself ready to encounter young Græme; rehearsing a speech of brotherly counsel and warning to him; even trying to show up his good points to Sylvie; and, lo! you upset all my calculations, and bring in tri-

umphantly, not the bonnie young Græme, but that tip-top fellow, Everson! The wiles of women are beyond my comprehension."

By the time he finished his wife had recovered the power to speak calmly.

"Trudie, I am very glad for you. I think you have chosen well. Elwood Everson is a man in a hundred; his relations with his mother and sister show that. I suppose it is your being there so much—almost as one of the family—which has led us astray in our conjectures."

"I suppose so, Sylvie. I was surprised myself, when—when—I found where my heart belonged," she added shyly with the pretty color spreading over her face. "But Sylvie, he is a good son and brother. So good and kind and attentive! He would not neglect or slight his mother even for me." She laughed her own merry laugh.

Stewart said, half in jest, half in earnest, "You are willing, I suppose, that such a state of affairs should last; that the mother should always have the first place? You would always be willing to yield to her?"

"Of course I should. She is such a dear lady, too! I can't say old lady, for she is as bright and active and busy as any of her daughters. It will be nice to gain a mother, as well as a—" the bright

blush filled the pause. "For sisters, there never has been a lack. Has there, Sylvie?"

The impulsive girl put her arms around her sister's neck; and in the little silence which followed, both recalled vividly a mother's parting words—"You must be mother and sister, both, to little Gertrude, now, my Sylvie." Well had her heart kept that trust.

After Stewart was asleep that night, his wife went softly from the room, and tapped at her sister's door. It was as she had suspected; Gertrude had also put on her wrapper, and sat in the easy chair before the grate fire musing.

"Oh, Sylvie, you will take cold," she cried, yet her heart was glad at the dear presence; and she pushed forward a big rocker, and wrapped a shawl about her sister as she seated herself.

"I thought you would be sitting here; and I couldn't resist coming to you. Oh, Trudie, must it be soon?"

Through her tears, Gertrude could not repress a smile.

"I have a suspicion, dear, that it must. Or rather, I think that Elwood will not want to wait long. But you know, Sylvie, we shall probably always stay near each other, you and I. Nothing can draw me away from my sister-counsellor.

That is the one thing which is settled, without either question or answer. I am to have my Sylvie near, to whom I may carry every hope and doubt and gladness of my life."

The hours slipped by while the sisters talked. There seemed so much to say—so many little tender things and thoughts which sprang up at this first disturbance of the happy routine life.

The spring dawn-light was very near when Sylvie Yates returned to her own room, and as for Gertrude, she only lay and thought upon the new sweetness which had come into her life, making its possibilities greater, its aims nobler, its prayers more fervent and sincere.

Somehow, when she knelt to thank God for this glad gift, a sudden remembrance came to her of what Rica had said, so short a while before, regarding a certain Church festival. She pondered, a while—"It was essentially the woman's day," Rica had said, the day when they all, sisters of that pure Virgin, might learn how the "power of the Highest" ever overshadowed them; how, in the things that were "too hard" for them, they must trust all to Him, accepting the mysterious ways which He set before them with sweet humility and tender reverence.

Might she not—who now was about to renounce

her girlhood, at His call, and to accept the mystery and blessing of womanhood—might she not then kneel and pray for this power of the Highest to overshadow her, for His grace to keep her, His hand to hold hers, and stay her from searching the things which were above her strength ?

Ah, yes. Late as it was, Gertrude rose from her knees to find the small Prayer Book and the Lessons which she had not long ago bought for herself, though no one knew it, and sought out the beautiful Lesson of which Rica had spoken.

The sweet refrain sounded again and again as she lay dreamily recalling the events of the last few hours.

Gertrude Preston was not one to talk her religion, even with the friend or the sister whose heart responded to her lightest word, but she felt deeply—how deeply none knew, even of those who knew her most intimately. Once let her impulsive young heart be touched, once let her pause to consider a certain truth, and she would be deeply earnest over it, would apply all her powers to its fulfilment. Now, though she said no word of it to any one, under all the sweet joy of her love, beneath the gladness and the memory of Elwood Everson's least word and look, lay the deep, reverent thought that God had sent her the gift; that

He would be her strength in all responsibility which accompanied it.

Alas, if we could but keep the dew of the first sweet sunrise hour upon the roses of our life, if we could but bind our souls with that first strong all-promising thrill which touches so every chord of our being at joy's morning-time!

Gertrude was not surprised, though Mr. Everson had said nothing of it, to receive a call early the next day from his mother and Rica.

He came with them, and after his first gentle greeting, which meant so much in its calm dignity, he gave Gertrude up to them.

The mother was much like him, in her quiet tender ways; but Gertrude had learned to know her well, and understood how to value her every word and embrace.

"Dear child, I am very glad Elwood has brought me another daughter. He knew that the old house would miss its gay songster soon, if we did not open our hearts to bid her stay."

"He knew too, that I could not get on without my bonnie twin sister," added Rica, hugging and kissing her friend as soon as her mother gave her a turn. "You darling, how lovely of you to come and be one of us! I have had visions and dreams of it; but this is reality!" Her laughing manner

and gay words covered a depth of real emotion. Elwood knew this, so did Gertrude, and they loved her the better for it.

Mrs. Everson asked for Sylvie, and that little matron was duly summoned, and treated with all proper respect and courtesy. She was greatly pleased with the elder lady's cordial yet dignified manner, and the affection with which she evidently regarded Gertrude.

Altogether, it was an agreeable call, to all parties concerned. Certainly the three ladies found no fault, and discovered many things to discuss among themselves when after a while Elwood contrived to draw Gertrude away for a little private conversation.

After that allowance made to her brother, Rica thought she had earned a right to stay with her friend, when the others returned, one to her home duties, the other to his business affairs.

"And I will bring her home with me to dinner," she added, with a half-questioning glance at her brother.

"Yes, do come, dear," said the mother.

"You will not wait for any ceremony on the part of the girls, I am sure."

"Oh no indeed," responded Gertrude, with a

shy smile. "Since you have been so kind, I surely cannot refuse to do my part."

She did not feel as sure of "the girls" as she felt of the mother and Rica. Yet no one should see this doubt, she resolved; and she would certainly meet them "half way."

So she and Rica were left together for a long confidential talk. Gertrude, however, let her friend do the most of the talking; she answering more by smiles and looks than by direct words.

They were friends of too long standing to need the etiquette of prompt question and answer or to feel troubled at a little silence. Besides, Gertrude was too deeply moved by this gladness which had shed its sunshine upon her life to speak much of it, even to one who was so nearly concerned. It was as yet sacred to Elwood and herself.

Rica saw this, and appreciated it. She felt a little anxiety regarding her sisters' reception of Gertrude in her new position; and with girlish impatience she wished to have the first encounter over.

On this point—a point where the thoughts of both were lingering—the girls did not speak that morning. But Rica had discovered the dainty Prayer Book and the open Lesson page upon her friend's table, as they sat together; and she took

hope, weaving together pretty threads of a love-story from life; while Gertrude bound up the shining waves of her hair, and put on the dress which she thought Elwood would like best. Happy girl, who had yet left girlhood behind her there on the unshadowed way.

V.

AS Gertrude had surmised, her lover plead for an early marriage. "This is March. If it might be in the early summer?" he said, watching her pretty face with the sweet lights passing over it. It told its own story. He read it with affectionate eagerness.

Her first thought was of leaving Sylvie, the dear mother-sister, who had been so tender and so true. Scarcely less so, in his own cheery way, had been her brother-in-law. It would be hard to go from these tried and trusted ones even at love's higher call.

Gertrude's lip quivered as she thought of it, yet her woman-love had so mysteriously twined itself about this man that his wishes were hers, and what he asked it was her pleasure to give.

"It shall be when you say, Elwood," she replied, with her soft voice full of tender yielding, and the timid blush brightening her face.

"Thank you, my darling. Then I will choose the month, and you shall select your own day. Shall it be June, the opening of the bright summer time, the beginning to us of our new life, a summer-life of love and all fair things?"

"June, yes, that is a beautiful month. Oh, Elwood, if our life might be as lovely and as bright as that," she added, raising her eyes full of happy affection to his own.

"Gertrude, my love, it shall be so if it is in my power to make it. I want my sweet songster to miss nothing that has gladdened her girlhood, but rather to find more and more of joy and brightness and beauty."

Many a similar conversation had these lovers during the few happy weeks which ensued between that bleak March time and their wedding-day in June, and ever the conviction seemed to grow in their hearts that their largest wishes for happiness would be fulfilled. As they watched the season grow and bud and blossom into full beauty and sweetness, so their hopes and lives seemed to approach more and more unto glad completeness. There were no drawbacks.

Rica's sisters had received their brother's *fiancée* with cordial affection; and their expressions of loyalty and sisterly devotedness toward Elwood,

their appreciation, even their exaggeration, of his fine qualities only met with a proud response from loving little Gertrude.

Sometimes they would give her warning in a merry way of what they should expect of "Elwood's wife."

"We have always said that his choice should be the first woman in the world!"

"He is so noble himself that you know we look to see his wife also above all ordinary women!"

But all this was said with a smiling manner and playfulness; so that Gertrude could not possibly take offense, had she been so inclined, which she was not. She generally replied that she "would keep herself under careful training, that she might not fail to fulfil their great expectations," and she would often end her merry rejoinder with an embrace "all 'round."

"Could any one help loving such a bright, affectionate creature," quoth Rica, "and might not any man envy Wood such a prize?"

Nevertheless there were certain points which were often discussed privately between the sisters; more especially the question of Gertrude's Churchmanship; rather her non-Churchmanship; for certainly, as far as they knew, she had given

no sign of any attachment to the Church, nor of any intention to cast in her lot among its members.

"But surely she will do so! Elwood will surely re—wish it of her. Don't you think so, mother?" remarked the eldest daughter, while her face took on a troubled expression.

"He will wish it of her certainly, my dear; and his wish ought to be sufficient for his wife. But we must try not to feel over-anxious. Let Elwood work out his own little problems."

Mrs. Richards watched the mother's placid, trustful face, and wondered how she could "take all things so quietly."

Ah, the years had brought many useful lessons to the elder woman, which, as yet, her daughters were far from knowing.

"But, mother, how much wiser it would be, in Wood, to have a complete understanding of all these matters now before he is married; and certainly if the beauties of the Church and its liturgy do not impress Trude at this time (when all that a lover loves and cares for becomes specially dear to his betrothed,) there is small hope that she will turn to it afterwards."

Jessie blushed as she uttered this emphatic word of warning. She was somewhat sensitive

just then on the subject of lovers and lovers' wishes.

The mother smiled and answered, "It is preferable no doubt that on such points a perfect understanding should be arrived at before marriage. But, my children, we can trust Elwood, I think, to act wisely and generously in such matters. Why should we vex ourselves with this question?"

The "children" smiled. They never rebelled in the slightest way at being kept "children" so long after all traces of childhood had passed away. If it pleased "mother," it was all right. But this question of Elwood's marriage was quite another thing; and they felt it hard to yield to the mother's quiet decision.

There is a love which finds its happiness in complete, unquestioning trust: whatsoever the loved one decides, by word or deed, that is accepted as the right decision. There is another love, which wears upon the life of the loved one by its eager questioning of his every word and deed, to find if those words and deeds attain the measure of that perfection with which they have credited him: this is a devouring love, which eats away all rest and satisfaction, both from the lives of the lover and the loved one.

These sisters of Elwood Everson had set their brother upon so lofty a pinnacle, their standard for him was so far beyond the ordinary manhood type, that they were, unconsciously, ever measuring his words and actions, striving to fit them to that high perfection. This had been comparatively an easy task for their love to accomplish until Elwood had found this "nearer one still and dearer one yet than all others." After that one great step had been taken, all the glory of their sisterly aspirations and hopes seemed to grow dim.

Had they not, then, loved this bright, gay girl, who had come and gone among them for so long? Yes, oh yes; they loved Gertrude Preston—as Gertrude Preston. But when Elwood, their immaculate brother, condescended to say that he too loved her—well, that changed everything!

"And to hurry it so, too; as if his life hitherto, had been lacking in care and love. It doesn't look well."

"Wouldn't it be pleasant to have it a double wedding, Jessie, since it must be? That would give a show of reason to Elwood's action."

The sudden color flashed to Jessie's cheek at her sister's half-mischievous remark.

"No! I could not make my affairs a conven-

ience to—to Gertrude, simply to try to cover her foolish haste."

"It was Wood whom I was thinking of, not Trude," answered Grace quietly. But she did not press the proposal any further, since it had been so ungraciously received.

And so these sisters spoke, from time to time, while the sweet spring days wore away, and the lovers became more and more dovoted to each other.

There was a certain pride (foolish, perhaps, but very human) in the hearts of the mother and sisters which forbade their asking any questions or betraying any eager curiosity; and so, although they wondered—perhaps I may even say worried—much as to certain preparations, they said no word to Elwood. This they knew to a certainty: that Gertrude continued attending her own Presbyterian services, as usual; and that Elwood had several times accompanied her, while she had only once attended the Church services, and that was on Easter Day, an occasion when non-members frequently came in to hear and enjoy. It was a question of very serious import to them, a source of constant uneasiness and dissatisfaction; yet they were too loyal to say anything to their brother which might seem like criticising his actions:

and they tried right honestly to be patient, and trust to his love for the Church and his sense of propriety to lead him safely and wisely through this trying ordeal.

Jessie, whose love for the Church was one of the strongest points in her nature, could not conceive of any one forming an attachment for another who was not a member of her own church. She had not done so! Her heart had been given to one who had been brought up, as she herself had, in all the sacred ways of God's household.

She regarded it as the very chiefest of his virtues; and indeed all of Mrs. Everson's family were well pleased at the choice of the second daughter. But then there were four daughters, and there was only one son, and upon that one had centred the affection, the pride, the great expectations which are usually divided among the several brothers of a household.

That Elwood Everson was a good son and brother, which none could deny, only increased the fervor of the female devotion, but it did not help him any in this particular crisis.

VI.

THERE were no troublesome or vexing discussions in the household of the expectant bride. All there was harmony and perfect sympathy. The wisdom of Gertrude Preston's choice was not questioned nor debated. Elwood Everson was a good man and honorable; he was of an excellent old family; his position in the business world and in society was unquestioned; he was a Christian gentleman and he loved Gertrude. These facts appeared to be sufficient to satisfy the sister and her husband. They had not spoken of his creed, neither to one another nor to Gertrude. If Sylvie had given it any thought, at least it had not vexed nor worried her. The days were only too precious and too fleeting for the fond sisters. They clung to one another, while the preparations for the wedding went on; talking over all the past, and living over again the merry girl-days.

"I am glad that Mr. Everson will take you first to the old home, dear. It will be so bright

and cheery, and you cannot possibly ever feel lonely while he is away all day. Then too it is so near to me. Oh, I could not have it otherwise."

"Nor I, you dear old Sylvie! I should run away from Elwood—even from him—if he took me anywhere far from you. Yes," she added, more seriously—"I am glad to go in the old home, his boyhood's home, where I have spent so many happy hours. It will please his mother better, too, Elwood says; and you know, dear, I should feel very selfish if I took her only son away from her, she has depended upon him for so long."

There was a sweet, girlish simplicity in all these little sayings of Gertrude's which pleased Sylvie and her husband greatly.

"She deserves to be happy, she is so perfectly unselfish!" cried the young wife, one evening as they sat together talking it over. "And all I ask for her is, that she may be as happy as I am."

"Oh, you modest little petitioner!" exclaimed the proud husband, bending his head to kiss the face which nestled against him, as the wife sat in her low sewing-chair at his side.

"She will be happy, never fear. Our Trudie is made for happiness; and they can't help loving her there in the Everson household, if they try. As

a general rule, I think it is preferable for a man to take his young wife to a home where they two will be by themselves; but in this case it certainly seems quite right and pleasant for Trudie to go to Everson's home. They all know her well; she has been like another daughter among them for a long time back; and the place must seem like home to her. Yes, I regard this as an exceptional case."

Thus with generous and cheerful spirit they regarded the approaching marriage; but no one thought of questioning how the difference in creed was to be arranged; and there appeared to be no feeling of anxiety on that subject. Perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Yates took it for granted that Gertrude would adopt the faith of her husband. Possibly it was not to them a matter of such importance as it was to the Everson family.

Elwood's sisters were the first after all to broach the subject to him.

"You will be married in church of course, Wood?"

"No, Jessie, I think not. Gertrude has chosen her sister's home; and I rather guess that it is her sister's wish."

They all looked their amazement; possibly something more than amazement; but Jessie on-

ly said quietly, "I am sorry," and the sisters kept all the rest with which their hearts were full to say among themselves when Elwood had gone.

It was the first bitter disappointment to them; and they felt it the more keenly, because it seemed to them to be only a prelude to all the other disappointments which might come to them through this marriage of their only brother with one who did not know and love the Church.

It was like a barrier between them and Elwood; they who had always lived in such free and friendly intercourse, such complete sympathy and harmony. It cast a restraint over their actions, when Gertrude was present; though she, being full of busy preparations, and more often with her special friend Rica than with the family generally, did not notice it.

It vexed Rica, who was so partial to her friend that she could not find fault with her decision in any matter; but she hoped it would all pass away when once Elwood was married, and they had all grown accustomed to the change.

"Be patient, my children," Mrs. Everson would say, "and remember that Gertrude has an only sister to consult with in all these things, and that she naturally would wish to please her in every

way. We must work and act with great tenderness and wisdom, if we would bring others to see and appreciate the riches of beauty which is the precious inheritance of Christ's Church. Remember, my children, the Lord's own command, which applies to each one who would do any work for Him: 'Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.'"

"But oh, mother, just think of the exquisite beauty of our marriage service, and the baldness, the mere nothingness, of any other! How can Elwood?"

"Just the same as any one else 'can' who is in love and should yield to the wishes of the woman he loves," exclaimed Rica, indignantly, and with girlish devotion to the cause of her friend.

"Rica, my child!" said the mother's reproving voice.

"Well, I can't help it, mother. If they are not careful, they will mar and spoil the whole thing by their complaints, when it ought to be all harmony and peace. I love the Church and its services quite as well as any one of you; quite as well; but I wouldn't fret my life away, and vex every one about me, and shadow my only brother's marriage time, just because he chooses to follow

his bride's wish, and be married by a Presbyterian!"

She left the room hastily, to hide the tears which were coming fast; and her sisters felt very uncomfortable.

"There is a great deal of plain truth in what Rica says." Mrs. Everson spoke in her usual calm way, which had more force than her youngest daughter's impetuous indignation; and it settled the controversy for the time being.

"We will try not to spoil poor Wood's wedding, at all events," said the eldest sister; though why she should say "poor Wood," no one quite knew.

"Why, my children, he has chosen a dear good girl, bright and loving. Let us be content and keep back any little wishes of our own, making the time as joyous and harmonious as possible."

It was a curious fact that about the same time that these good Church people and devoted sisters were thus vexing their hearts over this matter, Gertrude Preston sat alone in her room with the little Prayer Book which she had purchased open at the Order for the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony. She read it through several times with a pretty color coming and going in her face and a mist of happy tears in her eyes.

"Elwood would be pleased, I know," she said to herself. "It is very beautiful. I will ask Sylvie."

It had been an understood thing that good old Dr. Grey, who had baptized both sisters and had married Sylvie and Stewart, should also perform the ceremony for Gertrude. Yet there had been all along a feeling in Gertrude's heart that her lover would prefer that church form to which he was accustomed.

"If Sylvie likes it, that shall settle it," she said: and she went directly to Sylvie's room, carrying the pretty little Prayer Book open in her hand.

"Sylvie dear?"

"Well, Trudie, what is it? Come, sit here."

She had baby in her arms and drew a low rocking-chair to Gertrude's side, smiling fondly at her.

"I was reading over this Episcopal marriage service; Elwood has not said any thing about it; he has left everything to my pleasure; but I was wondering, Sylvie, if it would be better to use this form. What do you think?"

"Well, Trudie dear, the Episcopal marriage form is very beautiful; I think all denominations acknowledge that; and it is often used by those who are members of other churches."

Then she paused and sat thinking for a moment.

"Do you want very much, or do you feel that you ought to use this form, Trudie?"

"No; I only felt that it might please Elwood if I chose that. But he is so kind, I know that my choice, whatever it is, will content him; and I shall be guided altogether by what you advise."

"Then, dear, I will speak frankly. For myself, or for Stewart, we should be quite satisfied to have you make this choice to please Mr. Everson, and be married by this beautiful ceremony; but I think that our faithful friend and counsellor, Dr. Grey, would feel somewhat slighted if he were not asked to come and marry one of his old Sunday School children; and as for requesting him to use this service (as I know is sometimes done), well, I should not want to do it. You know the old doctor is peculiar; and he is too, I think, a little prejudiced against the Episcopal Church. I don't believe he would do justice to this beautiful service!" she added, with a little laugh, yet looking anxiously into her sister's face, to see if her words had wounded her any.

But no; she seemed to feel relieved that some one had decided this question for her.

"I think you are right, Sylvie," she said, after some thought. "I will tell Elwood that all is settled, and I know that he will be quite satisfied."

And was he? In a certain sense, yes! He was satisfied because the girl he loved had chosen: and, in comparison with his love, other matters seemed to weigh little at this time.

"Very well, darling, that will please me," he said; and, holding both her hands, he added further unimportant words to which we need not listen; and as he meditated upon the decision, walking homeward, he said to himself, "She will come to love the Church in time, just as she loves all beautiful and worthy objects," and his pulses beat joyfully at the thought of enjoying with her all those sweet and holy associations which had been part of his life always.

VII.

IT was all over at last, and it had been—so said every one concerned—a thorough success. Nothing had been done or left undone to mar the harmony of the day.

Gertrude had been just her own bright self through all the trying occasion; and one could easily discern how happy she was in this new relationship, which was changing her whole life; and certainly Elwood Everson was not far behind his chosen bride, in point of happiness, though he was more sedate in the exhibition of it.

"His whole heart is in his eyes when he looks at her," said one of the company, "and there is a wondrous depth of feeling in his voice when he speaks to her."

Yes, this was true; even Gertrude herself scarcely knew the power of that manly love which she had awakened. If she had known, if she could have realized the depth of that life-current which she had stirred, she would have stood awed

and affrighted at the responsibility which was henceforth laid upon her.

A woman rarely realizes this sufficiently—this responsibility which comes hand in hand with the love of that man who seeks to link his life with hers. If she did so, fewer lives would be marred and ruined, fewer homes desolated, and more men would stand nobly among the ranks of God's great workers. Every one had been pleased with Mrs. Yates and her management of the wedding; even the Eversons, to whom the occasion was bald and meaningless without the familiar Prayer Book form, were quite charmed by Sylvie in her capacities as hostess and as sister of the bride.

She was so genial, so cordial, that every one was made to feel comfortable; was so bright and so cheerful that no one save her own husband and Gertrude could begin to suspect what a pain was in her heart all the while.

Good old Dr. Grey, who had held both Sylvie and Gertrude in his arms as babies, fulfilled his part equally well; but as he sat afterwards watching the guests who flocked about the young couple, he shook his head and said to himself, "It is not wise, I fear. She will stray from the old paths and imbibe popish notions of ceremonials and written prayers; or else she will become

altogether heedless because she cannot agree with the views of her husband. She is so æsthetic in her tastes, that I am much afraid she will soon begin to imagine there is a sort of religion in these outward forms and white-robed processions and daybreak carollings, poor child!"

Thus the good old gentleman mused on, while the happy girl, with her "æsthetic tastes," flitted here and there, saying her good-byes and preparing to start away with him for whom she had given up all her girlish life and freedom.

How happy she looked! It gave Sylvie courage and strength, to see her; to hear the glad music of her voice. It made other hearts glad, too. The mother of that "only son" was a brave woman and very proud; yet she trembled with repressed emotion as she listened to the words which gave her boy to another—her boy, her one precious lad, who had made life so good and pleasant to her, who had never failed her in any moment of need. What should she do without him? Ah, mothers, only God can comfort you at such a time. That "power of the Highest," overshadowing, shall cheer you and give you peace.

Now, it lacked only a little while to the parting. Mrs. Everson heard a soft voice behind her say, "Elwood, go and sit with your mother now until

the carriage comes; every thing is quite ready, and you will not be wanted. See, here is a quiet corner in the bay-window."

She heard a low reply, and then her son's arm was wound about her, and she was drawn into the quiet, curtained corner of which the young wife had spoken. The old lady's heart was very full, but she struggled bravely for his sake.

"Elwood, she is a dear unselfish girl; we cannot help loving her."

"Yes, my mother, she is all that you could wish," he answered quietly, and even that mother who had borne him did not know aught of the depth and power of the love which lay beneath those calm words.

As long as Mrs. Everson lived, it would never be forgotten that, in the new pride of her young wifehood, in the midst of the joy and glory of her marriage festival, the young wife had bade her husband go aside for a while and sit with his mother. Whatever might come in the years that were to follow, that at least could never be blotted out.

In half an hour there was a soft movement of the curtain and the bride's sweet face looked in. Mrs. Everson held out her arms.

"My daughter! My dear little daughter!"

"I will try to be that to you, dear mother," she

whispered, blushing, her downcast eyes bright with tears.

Then they were summoned; and the farewells were quickly said. Bright and cheerful to the last, Gertrude's face looked back from the carriage window, like a gleam of sunlight touching the little group in the doorway.

All was over, and the mother and the sisters turned silently to the lonely rooms. Sylvie detained Mrs. Everson for a little rest, and every one tried to be cheerful.

When the mother and her daughters were about to return home, Mr. Yates constituted himself their escort, declaring in his own cheery way that they must use him as their son and brother for the time being, "and notice how well Mrs. Yates had trained him" in all those things which it is important a man should observe.

He succeeded at least in bringing a certain cheer to their over-full hearts, and in making himself the object of their profound gratitude and regard.

This duty performed, Stewart returned home, again to become the consoler; this time to his wife, who had well-nigh broken down after the long ordeal through which she had maintained so brave and unselfish a part.

"Well, Sylvie, you have one source of solid comfort and that is that Trudie has chosen such a fine man. He is no boy, to worry her with his foolish freaks, and to expect to find perfection in any wife."

How fondly he looked at her, for all his saucy insinuation, and she could not help laughing as her eyes met his.

"Of course our Trude we know has been well tutored, by all precept and example; yet these young fellows sometimes are very exacting and make no end of unhappiness for their wives; but Everson now is a man, every inch of him, and we shall find no such trouble coming to cloud our sister's merry sunshine. So I, for one, say that to-day's work has been a good one. Don't you, young master of ceremonies?"

He tossed the baby gaily up and down among the flowers and vines and stately palms with which the rooms were decorated; and his wife, though she could not help feeling as if she were in a deserted bower, in a fair nest from which the bright singing-bird had flown, was yet quite cheered and comforted. She sang baby to sleep; gave her orders to the servants; and even found courage, finally, to go to Gertrude's room, where the sweet breath of withering roses brought the tears again.

Some things were left there ; many little treasured belongings, which would doubtless by and by go to adorn the bridal chamber in the old Everson mansion. Gertrude's touch seemed fresh upon them all ; her bright presence seemed to pervade the room.

Sylvie drew the curtains with a lingering tenderness, as if shutting in for preservation all the sweet and sacred memories.

Two things she noticed had gone from the room on this bridal trip; one was the little velvet-boxed Prayer Book and Hymnal, the other a picture of herself.

"The dear foolish child, to cumber her trunk with that," she said softly, with a quivering smile on her lips. Then she knelt by Gertrude's bed, and prayed for her sister and for herself ; that grace might be given to both, sufficient for all that the future had in store.

Returning to her husband with a cheerful face, just as he was taking a look at his evening paper, before retiring to rest, she astonished him by asking, "Then you don't anticipate any worry for Trudie on account of the difference in creed ?"

"My dear unbelieving wife, no ! I have not the slightest fear for our Trudie on that account. Love can work miracles even with differing

creeds, and particularly when the lovers are two such sensible people as our little sister and Mr. Elwood Everson."

"There, Stewart, read away, I won't be silly any more."

"Be 'silly' just as much and as long as you please, my wife. What is your husband made for, if not to reply to your queries and to charm away your fretting anxieties?" and this model husband smiled so fondly and so patiently at his wife across the paper which he had laid down, that the longing and the anxiety and the questioning of her heart, all resolved themselves into this one wish—"Oh, that Gertrude might have such a man to make her life happy!"

VIII.

"SYLVIE! Darling Sylvie! Here is your sister again. Here is your own old troublesome child."

But Sylvie knew better. Much as she appreciated this early coming, (before, as Elwood said, "even before the dust of travel was properly removed,") she knew well, looking into Gertrude Everson's happy eyes that it was not her very own old sister come back to her.

No, this was her "child" no longer; this was a woman, whose true woman heart had been stirred from the depths by a life-long love. Never again could that pretty, proud little head wear girlhood's simple crown; from henceforth it bore womanhood's coronet, set richly with sweetest roses, and also sanctified with the thorns without which no fairest rose ever blooms.

"My dear, dear Trudie! My little sister! Welcome home again!"

"A thousand welcomes to our bonnie sister and

to her husband!" Stewart, ever ready with graceful good-cheer to cover his wife's tender emotion and give her time to recover herself, kissed Gertrude fondly, and then went forward to greet Mr. Everson, who had stood somewhat back, realizing what this meeting must be to the sisters.

"Forgive me, Elwood, my dear brother. I know you can understand and will appreciate my —my—"

"Yes, Sister Sylvie; that is all right," replied the deep, quiet voice, and Elwood stepped forward to bestow his brotherly kiss.

"Sylvie dear, will you come around to the house? You know the mother is there; and she wants her big boy, as it is natural she should, after his long absence. Mother bade us ask you and Stewart to come back with us; that we might all be together this first evening."

The young wife said it all very sweetly, with no affectation and no embarrassment; only a quiet realization of what was required of her at this time. It was no wonder that the husband's heart was full of happy pride as he looked and listened.

"Certainly we will go, dear, and count it a very great kindness on the part of Mrs. Everson."

She tried to say, and meant to say, "on the part of your mother;" but the words failed her; she

could not give them utterance; the remembrance was too vivid of that other mother, whose sweet, pale face had been turned so fondly on her "little Gertrude" at the last hour.

In a short time, the four people were on their way together to the bride's new home. It was a glad day in that home. The beloved son and brother had come back again; trifling frets and cares all disappeared in the face of that one joyful fact; and all was sunshine and generous feeling.

The elderly lady went forward to greet her guests with gracious courtesy.

"I thank you so much for coming," she said. "I fear I have been asking a great deal of you; but you see I have only one boy," smiling while tears shone in her eyes.

"Indeed, Mrs. Everson, we thank you for letting us come to share with you your son's presence to-day."

Amid general good-will, the travellers sat down to tell of their trip, which had been an unusually pleasant one, without anything to mar its perfect brightness.

"As soon as my wife can persuade mother to accompany us, we shall cross the ocean," said Elwood, when some one spoke of the length of his wedding journey. "I have been exerting all my

powers of persuasion for a long time, but unsuccessfully."

The old lady shook her head smilingly. "No, my son; if I had not courage sufficient for the undertaking in my younger days, I am quite sure that I cannot now join the modern crowd of tourists."

She repeated the words "my son" with much the same fond accent as that son himself used when he said "my wife."

In truth Elwood was much like his mother in every respect; there was a gentleness combined with a force of character in each which is somewhat rare to see.

"You and Gertrude shall go together sometime, when I feel that I can spare you," she added, laying her hand affectionately upon Gertrude's; but Gertrude knew very well that there was small probability of her husband leaving his mother to go abroad, much as he would have enjoyed such a trip with his wife. She fancied that the elder lady understood this, too, and felt a certain pride in it.

Gertrude took her sister up-stairs during the evening to show her the two handsome rooms, adjoining each other, which had been given to her.

"Are they not lovely? Here is Elwood's desk, and here are his books, and here is my new work-

table," an elegant and complete affair which had been brought from across the ocean by one of Elwood's friends, at his special request. "On purpose for me. Was it not thoughtful?"

"Why, yes, darling, you ought to be a happy little woman."

"And that am I," the girl-wife replied, waltzing about for one moment like her own old self.

Her sister watched with a trembling smile and a little, vague pain at her heart; somehow this fond, foolish woman could not rid her mind of a certain gloomy picture of the four sisters down-stairs. Rica was well enough, a dear girl of whose affection one felt sure; but the other three! In her excited imagination they seemed to array themselves like a body-guard about their beloved brother, that the nearer and dearer young wife might not take possession of him altogether.

"But, Trude dear, you must be 'wise as a serpent,' you know. All wives have to be so."

"Do they? Well, I'll try, Sylvie; but I never was renowned for my wisdom you know."

She laughed gaily. Somehow, on that day of glad reunion she had returned to her old girlish gaiety, and felt no weight of womanhood's responsibility.

"Life is so good, Sylvie dear, I can sing and be

happy ; but I don't know about being wise. Try this great, luxurious chair ; isn't it complete? Elwood says it is mine ; but I think he fills it much better. I prefer this little fairy-like one which just reaches my work-table so nicely ; and, Sylvie, when you bring baby round to spend the day with me he can sleep in that great lovely chair."

"Just the thing," responded her sister, catching a little of the new wife's merry spirit.

"It was so nice of mother and the girls," Gertrude explained, as they went down-stairs, "to come home from the sea-side early, on purpose to see that the house was all prepared and bright for our return ; we had not expected any such thing. We were going to stay over a night with you, and then go on down to —— Beach, to be with them ; but I am very glad we are settled. I have had so much travelling—and such delightful travelling, too—that I am altogether satisfied for this season. You will not go away again, will you, Sylvie?"

"Not if baby keeps well ; and I think he seems much stronger, since our mountain vacation. I must tell you about it when we have time for a good long talk together."

The Everson home was the scene of quite an informal reception on that evening. The news had spread among their friends that the newly-married

couple had returned from their trip; and many who were at home again from sea-shore and mountain "ran in" to welcome the young couple.

Gertrude was proud to see how her husband was honored by men of standing and power; how his opinion was sought on great questions; and how calmly and with assurance he spoke upon many important matters. And he, with all his learning, and high talents, had loved her! Not only that, but he was equally proud of her, as she realized when he presented to his friends "My wife," with that wondrous tenderness in the utterance of the words; and when he asked her to sing, leading her to the piano, and choosing the songs for her.

"Yes, I am very happy," she said again to herself, as she had said it to Sylvie; and when all the friends were gone, and the late hour found each of the family weary and ready for rest, Elwood, Prayer Book in hand, drew her to a seat by his side.

Then for the first time she listened to that beautiful Form of Family Prayer which the Church has given her children, that none—however weak or slow of speech—need go to an unsanctified rest.

The young wife's heart was deeply touched as her husband uttered with earnest reverence those

simple and beautiful petitions. She wondered that she had not noticed them before, in looking over her own little Prayer Book. Ah! there were many beauties hidden there which she had yet to discover.

IX.

"ELWOOD dear, it is our first Sunday at home—and—I would so like to sit in the old pew by Sylvie's side, just to be with her, you know. It isn't the church that I care for; I am ready to go where you prefer; only just to-day, if you were willing, I do long to be in the old childhood spot."

She had been standing by the open window, breathing in the fragrance of the September morning; she turned slowly toward him with such a sweet, pleading look in her eyes that he could not resist caressing her and answering, "Certainly, my wife, we will go where you wish. It is only natural that you should want to be with your sister on this first home Sunday. I can worship God anywhere, since He has been so gracious to me and given me such a wife."

She saw his rare smile and felt content. It must be all right since Elwood agreed so readily.

"Thank you, my husband," and she made the strong man very happy with one of her shy and seldom-offered caresses. He did not even then think how he would miss the Church service so dear to him; the only passing thought of trouble, was of how his sisters would hear the news. Like the manly man that he was through and through, he went straight to the subject, with calm unflinching assurance of being in the right. He did not wait for one of his sisters to ask the question, as he felt sure they would do. He said simply, "I am going to take Gertrude to her old place, this morning, in the pew by the side of her sister where she has sat for so many years."

Strange to say, it was Rica who made the first exclamation of disappointment: but it was only disappointment because she had counted on Trude's company at church.

"Oh, that is too bad! I thought we were all going together."

"There will be plenty of other Sundays for that, Rica," answered her brother, smiling at her childish look of disappointment.

"I wanted so to go there this first Sunday, Rica. I hope you won't think that I am selfish!"

Her little speech was intended for others as well as for Rica; and she felt a little hurt at the silence

which they kept, leaving the youngest sister to answer for all.

"Selfish indeed! You? Why, we know you, Trudie; and it is the knowing you which makes me want to have you at church with me, you see; but never mind, as Wood says, there are plenty of Sundays besides this one, and I can wait."

Elwood looked his thanks; the other sisters keeping silence, Mrs. Everson came to the relief, and said, in her quiet, pleasant way, "I suspect, if the truth were told, we are all of us somewhat disappointed at not having you and Elwood with us at church, but we must try to be unselfish. Remember, girls, that Gertrude is Mrs. Yates' one, only sister, and it is altogether natural that they should wish to worship side by side on this especial Sunday."

"Then you will come with us to Evening Service, won't you, Trudie?" asked the widow, being the first to recover from the feeling of indignant disappointment which had been general among the three sisters.

Gertrude smiled pleasantly, and answered, "I think I may promise that very gladly, Sarah," and the little discussion ended by Rica's rising and saying she must hurry off to Sunday School.

Before they started for Church Elwood went to

his mother's room, and said calmly, "Mother, Sylvie is Gertrude's only sister, as you so kindly reminded the girls at breakfast; she has been a mother to her as well all these years since their mother died, and I want to be very generous toward her even when her wishes do not accord entirely with my own. I feel sure that she will want Gertrude and me to go home to dinner with her to-day; I should not be surprised if she asked this for every Sunday. I wanted to ask you, if you would think it a just and pleasant arrangement that we should go there every other Sunday and be at home on the alternate Sundays?"

His words and manner had been so respectful and so deliberate, showing no least trace of passion, that the mother had been able to take in the full force of his argument and to see things just as he wished that she should. She was, also, well pleased at his coming to her in the old way, doing her that honor which a son should ever render to his mother.

"I fully appreciate all that you tell me, my boy, and I think your plan a very wise one, which will doubtless save any hard feeling on either side. I agree to it with all my heart, and if you do not return home to dinner to-day, I will explain all to the girls."

"Thank you, mother," and he bent to kiss her cheek before he passed out.

Mrs. Everson said to herself, as she slowly walked to her writing-table and took up her Prayer Book, "Whatever disappointments the Lord sees fit to send my boy in the future, he will certainly always be sure of that blessing which is promised to those who honor father and mother."

The good lady had to be very wise that day, and she knew it.

Before again encountering her daughters, she knelt in earnest prayer for strength and guidance, and did not leave her room till it was time to start for service. Then, meeting her daughters, she said gently, "Now, my children, let us put from us, with strong will, every vexing thought, and remember only that we are going to worship Him who orders all things, both in Heaven and on the earth. We want His peace in our hearts to-day."

Her words had their effect; Mrs. Richards and Rica took their usual places on either side of the mother, and with their yielding to the mother's wishes came the reward of peace. Gertrude's heart was a little troubled as she walked away with her husband.

"I am afraid the girls felt hurt, Elwood," she said with a little tremor in her tone.

"I think not, dear; perhaps a little disappointed at not having you with them. It is really very difficult for those who have lived all their lives in the Church, and never have known anything else, to understand how any one can be happy and satisfied in any other place on Sunday. To them, there doesn't seem to be anything but the Church; you will be patient with them, I know, my wife."

"Indeed I will, and try my best to please them. It is only Sylvie who has drawn me so strongly this morning," there was a pathos in her words and tone which touched the strong man's heart.

"Yes, darling, I understand."

Then he told her how his mother had spoken, and that together with the touch of Sylvie's hand closing upon her own as she took her place beside her, drove away the last lingering shadow and made the young wife quite happy.

It was as Elwood had expected, Stewart and Sylvie had settled it in their own minds that they were to have "Trudie" for the Sunday's dinner; "and of course Trudie includes Brother Elwood," said Mrs. Yates, in a most cordial way.

"Indeed she does, Sister Sylvie, and so we will thank you and accept your kind invitation for to-day, and you and Gertrude can arrange for the future at your leisure."

Gertrude felt that he trusted her completely, and her heart was very glad.

This earthly love is a strong power to draw us away from any other allegiance, as Elwood Everson realized that Sunday morning. Ever and anon, through the prayers and the sermon of good old Dr. Grey there arose a great longing in the young husband's heart for the beautiful accustomed liturgy of the Church, but each time that longing was stilled by the thought of that dear girl wife at his side, by the touch of her fingers as they held the hymn book between them. His ear seemed strained to catch some sound of the glorious old "Te Deum," or of the "Holy, Holy, Holy," which was the heart's universal cry at that Trinity season. But he heard his wife's gentle breathing, he looked down into her sweet face, and forgot all things else.

He had once had happy dreams of the sanctifying of his marriage day by a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, but these dreams had vanished long ago, and now he was only waiting patiently for the wife he loved so well to learn the beauty of that Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper which the Prayer Book contained. He knew she would learn it in time; for he prayed daily that she might. He could afford to be pa-

tient, for God had given into his keeping a sweet and loving woman, wise in many ways, yet simple as a child to trust where her heart had found its happy resting-place.

"Your brother will not leave the dear Mother Church surely?" questioned the young assistant of St. Ann's, the Rev. Robert Sherwood, coming forward as the ladies were leaving the church steps.

"Oh no, there is no danger of that; it is only that he is not thoroughly settled down yet," and Mrs. Everson with quiet dignity changed the subject, as the young clergyman followed them out, walking by Grace's side.

What Grace said to him over and above that as he walked on with her, the others being ahead, was not known. But it appeared at dinner-time, and afterwards, that Grace was less tender than the others, and less lenient toward the sister-in-law who had not adopted her husband's Church with such alacrity as had been looked for.

X.

"TRUDIE, will you go to service with us this morning?"

"To service, Rica, on Tuesday? What for, dear girl?"

"It is the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels. Don't you remember Mr. Sherwood gave notice of it on Sunday?"

"Why, yes; I do remember, now you speak of it; but you will have to excuse me this time, Rica, please. I promised Sylvie to help her with Baby Prince's new suit; she depends on me always to fit the little rogue, he is so restless!"

Rica sighed, but said nothing. Her sister-in-law took note of the sigh.

"What is it, Rica? Do you care much? Who is Saint Michael anyhow, and all the angels?"

"Oh Trudie!"

"Well, dear, forgive me; I don't mean to say anything wrong; but you know I must learn about these things."

"Well, certainly I care Trudie; there is no use in denying that; and I thought you had not been at any saint's day service yet, you and Wood were away at the sea-shore on St. Matthew's Day; and so—"

"St. Matthew! Ah, now that I can understand; I knew of St. Matthew; but why should the angels be sainted and have days kept for them? And, oh Rica, while we are on the subject, why do you call your Church after a Saint Ann? Who was Ann, and why was she sainted? I have often wondered about that."

Rica had her own little cause for wonder, too; which was that Gertrude did not ask her husband about all these things; but she did not express her wonder.

"A good many Churches have been named after or in honor of St. Ann, or St. Anna, as she is sometimes called. She was the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and was honored in the ancient Church. Do you not think it, Trude, perfectly proper that we should revere such a woman?"

"Yes, indeed, Rica; quite so; and I am really very glad to understand this. I am greatly deficient in such old-time lore, and I shall depend upon you to enlighten me."

"I shall be glad enough to teach you, Trude, and I feel sure you will grow to like it more and more. I am sorry you can't go with us this morning."

"Well, I'll go some other time, Rica; wait till the next saint has his turn, or hers."

As she uttered the last sentence in her light way Mrs. Richards and Jessie entered the room. Rica glanced up quickly, and saw the look of surprised horror upon both faces. Gertrude was busy over some embroidery for the aforesaid "Baby Prince," and did not notice anything.

"We always speak with reverence and respect of those things, Gertrude."

"And did not I, Jessie? Certainly I meant no disrespect."

"Why, of course she did not. We have been talking about these matters, Trudie and I, and she will one day love all these things just the same as we do."

"I shall try my best, for your sake, Rica!" young Mrs. Everson replied, as she rose, work in hand, to leave the room. She put her hand affectionately on Rica's arm in passing; but her eyes were full of tears.

"She is getting very sensitive, it seems to me," said Jessie, feeling half ashamed.

"Well, you didn't speak at all nicely, and I don't wonder that she feels it," said the younger sister, indignantly.

"If you are going to undertake the training of our sister-in-law in Church matters, Rica, you ought certainly to require a proper amount of respect on her part for the things which we revere," said Mrs. Richards somewhat severely.

"Training!" exclaimed the girl, with sarcastic emphasis, "training Elwood's wife! No, thank you; I think my brother quite capable of doing all the training that is needful; but I love Trudie, and I shall not hurt her feelings on any account." Then she too left the room.

By and by all these sat together in God's house, honoring the memory of the great archangel and praying for the "succor and defense" of those "holy ones" who do the Father's bidding.

Perhaps indeed certain words of the Gospel regarding the offenses which "must needs come" fell with special meaning upon the ears of those older sisters. Had they not just caused an offense, by their manner of speaking to one who stood very near the Church portals? Perhaps that one little "offense" might turn her aside from the Church forever. Ah, how weak were they, after all, as

champions of the Lord! Well might they pray to be succored and defended.

Then came the beautiful hymn, which is also a prayer, and which melted the last remnant of pride and vexation from their hearts:

> "Let us, with zeal like theirs inspired,
> Strive in the Christian race;
> And, freed from every weight of sin,
> Their holy footsteps trace."

At least the Church service had always this blessing for these zealous sisters, that it gave them peace by teaching them their own weakness and His strength who is the Church's one foundation! By the time that the service was ended, ended too was their vexation and discontent.

"Oh Rica, why can't we keep from fretting each other so?" said Jessie, drawing her arm through the younger one's and smiling sadly at her.

"Because we were not all born Church people," said Mrs. Richards, looking back at them as if she too wanted to acknowledge that she had been hasty.

"I suppose I must love people more than I love the Church," said Rica, half-tearful, yet smiling at her own words. "People as people, you know, instead of people as the Church. It sounds

strange, and maybe it is wrong, but I can't help it."

"I think perhaps if it is wrong, good may come from it in this case, so don't worry, Rica," spoke up Grace. "If any other than Elwood brings Trudie into the Church, it will be you, with your gentle ways and your loving forbearance."

All this was very pleasant and altogether proper, if only the spirit which prompted it had kept the pre-eminence through the "ups and downs" of every-day life. It was too much of an impulse which needed the Church's special arousing, the inspiration of her holy days, the incense-breath of her services. Far better thus than not at all, it is true, yet does the Church teach us that we shall go on "from strength to strength;" that the soul's food with which she supplies us through her services, shall keep us ever ready to fulfil all demands, vigorous and untiring to do that which the Master requires of us, even so filled to overflowing that they who stand near us may be gladdened and refreshed, taking knowledge of us that we belong to Jesus.

Gertrude had relieved her over-wrought feelings by a little cry behind Baby Prince's golden curls, and was duly comforted by Sylvie, and when she returned with her husband at dinner-time, she

appeared her usual gay self. Rica kissed her with enthusiasm, and wondered, laughingly, "how it was that Wood always knew just where to find his wife when she was out."

"Well you see, Rica, I have fallen into a sort of habit of looking in at Mrs. Yates' front windows as I go by, and when I see there a young lady who very much resembles my little wife and who smiles and nods encouragingly at me, why I go in without further invitation. Take warning all of you against the force of habit!"

Elwood felt unusually merry, just then; he had been pleased at Rica's loving reception of his wife; he appreciated anything of that kind, and his youngest sister was daily endearing herself to him by such little efforts and actions of kindness. The little cloud seemed likely to pass over, leaving the habitual clear sky, thanks to the persistent sunshine of two young loving hearts.

"We need say nothing to Trude; she seems to feel all right; things do not go very deep with her." Thus the older sisters concluded among themselves, congratulating one another that there was to be no "foolish fuss." They did not want any such thing, "for dear Wood's sake."

But later on in the evening, as Jessie, coming in from a drive with her affianced, went to her room,

Gertrude passed quietly from the parlor and followed her up-stairs.

"Sister Jessie, may I say a word to you? I fear I was a little irreverent in my way of speaking this morning, and—a—little bit cross too at being told of it. I hope you will forgive and forget?"

"Why, dear child, of course; there was fault on both sides, I think; for I am sure that I spoke too hastily. You see, Gertrude, I always forget that you are not one with us in just that matter. I only wish you were, dear," she added, putting her arm through Gertrude's and looking into the bright face which had so become the star lighting all her sedate brother's life.

"I wish so too, Jessie, since you care so much."

Elwood had noticed his wife's absence from the room and her return in company with Jessie; and when Gertrude and he were together in their own room that night, he asked her about it. She told him all, and ended by expressing her regret at her own careless words.

"It is just my foolish, childish way of speaking; and with Rica it never made any difference; she knows me well enough to be sure that I mean to be right, even when I blunder over a delicate subject."

"Ah yes, such an inveterate blunderer as she is, this little wife of mine," answered Elwood, drawing her within his arms and gazing fondly into her eyes, which the eager tears had somewhat dimmed. "I marvel that we can get on at all with her uncouth ways and words!"

"Oh well, dear, you are kind enough not to cast the light of criticism upon my unmeasured utterances; there is another light which you throw over all my imperfections. I wish it may never grow dim; but the girls are different, and I think they are disappointed because I do not become a Churchwoman as readily as they had hoped. I do begin to love your Sunday services, Elwood, and if they will be patient with me and give me a little time I dare say I shall learn to appreciate and enjoy these other days."

"Certainly, my darling, that is just what your husband has been saying in his own heart all along, and so we shall all be hopeful and patient, and my little wife must let nothing trouble her for a moment, since she is doing just right in this matter, but she must be her own dear bright-hearted self."

XI.

GERTRUDE had resolved to "look up" these things for herself, and to find out beforehand when the next holy day would be. She studied her little Prayer Book in private far more than any one gave her credit for doing. Those were golden days to the new husband and wife; they were drinking life's rich, red wine together, and with a glad trust they neither saw nor thought of any dregs beneath the sparkling draught, dreamed of no bitterness which could be mingled with such a sweet cup. Many a ride together in the Park, or down the now quiet beach drive had they; and the blood coursed with joyous vigor through their veins.

Sylvie and Baby Prince, who was now running about with true boyish independence, also had many pleasant trips with Gertrude, during the October days; impromptu excursions, drives, and small picnic parties, were indulged in to quite an extent. The rare, beautiful days made them all

very happy, and laid a sweet peace upon each heart. Happiness as well as grief leads the true soul to God; and the young wife who talked not so much of her religion as she strove to live it out day by day, found her heart drawn more and more toward the Source and Fountain of all joy. She thought more of holy things, of the pure heart which shall "see God;" of the life whose gladness we can only measure by our little gladness here below. She longed to live nearer to that God who had so blessed her, who had given her life's best things in such large measure. Her little Prayer Book was in her hands almost as frequently as was her Bible; she marvelled at its collection of beautiful prayers, she wanted to ask about them, how they came there, where from, but she was timid and could not decide whether she should ask her husband or Rica. In how many of those Collects was "thy Church," "Thy household the Church," mentioned with fervent petition for blessing!

"I will try to love that Church with all my heart," she said, "and to understand its ways."

One morning, it was the 18th of October, Sylvie ran in early to see her sister. Gertrude had been particularly bright and affectionate to her sisters-in-law that morning, feeling that she was about to

give them a pleasure, and she went to greet Sylvie with the same radiant face.

"A glorious morning, isn't it? Why didn't you bring Prince?"

"Oh, I can't stay, Trudie; I only ran around to get you; the Massons have sent me word of their arrival, and that they are coming to spend the day with me. I want you to help me entertain them."

Gertrude's face fell.

"Oh Sylvie, I cannot, dear."

"Cannot! Why? Are you going anywhere with Elwood?"

"Not with Elwood, that I know of; but, dear sister, it is one of the saints' days on which they have church, and I promised myself, you remember, that I would go the very next time to please them; they were all so disappointed because I did not go the last time."

"And so you think it is my turn to be disappointed now," said Sylvie smiling, yet looking really very much chagrined.

"You know better than that," Gertrude sighed, while she strove to be merry.

"If you would let me—oh, I have it! I'll come to luncheon; that will make it all right, dear. There won't be much entertaining to do before that.

I will come right from church; but do not wait for me in case I should be detained."

"Well, Trudie, I will do the best I can; I must learn, I suppose, to do without you; but it comes hard, dear—you have always been such a help to me."

"If I had a house of my own, you know, Sylvie," suggested the young wife.

"Yes, I know how that would be, only it seems to be not the house but the Church which is making the difference in you. There, never mind; it's all right, I suppose, for you to adopt the Church of your husband's family; I will try not to care. What time is it that your week-day Church begins?"

"At eleven, I believe."

In a short time Sylvie went away; and Gertrude, coming back from seeing her sister out, paused at the open sitting-room door to say cheerily, "May I go to church with you this morning? Eleven o'clock, isn't it? I wasn't quite sure."

"May you? You darling! Indeed you may, Trudie."

"We shall be so glad; we were hoping you might come."

"But mother was almost afraid to trust us to ask you, for fear we should annoy or vex you with our importunity," said Jessie.

Gertrude blushed, and smiled gratefully at her mother-in-law.

"If she only knew just how hard it is," was the young wife's troubled thought, for she could not forget Sylvie and her look of disappointment.

Now if Gertrude had only known it, her wisest plan would have been to go to that mother-in-law and tell her plainly of all her wishes and perplexities, receiving in return just that motherly counsel and help which she needed at this time. Again, with all her wisdom and her appreciation of people's motives and feelings, Mrs. Everson the elder was a proud lady, else her present plan would have been to go to her son's young wife and talk plainly with her of all this matter, telling her how much depended upon it, and how it was truly a part of a wife's love and trust to accept her husband's Church and to be his help-meet in highest things by worshipping there at his side. She knew very well that her son, like some few men who love strongly, carried a certain timidity in his love which hindered him from speaking with his wife upon this delicate topic. Why then should not his mother have put away her proud reserve, and been a true mother to this young wife? Alas, how we blunder, even in our love, and walk with folded

hands side by side with our dear ones, who are reaching out blindly for help and sympathy!

It was scarcely a success, this first effort of Gertrude's at pleasing her new relatives and obtaining an insight into the Church's holy day services; her heart was too pre-occupied.

She had no idea what the service was to be, and had imagined it would be quite short, allowing her time to be at her sister's before the hour for luncheon arrived. With honest intentions she strove to put from her all thought of Sylvie and her visitors, to fix her mind upon the Prayers and lessons ; but with a feeling of dismay she followed on one thing after another, prayers and hymns, collects, epistle and gospel, all beautiful, and which she would at any other time have enjoyed and appreciated. The sermon or lecture was short ; but following it came the most solemn and blessed of all services, that Holy Sacrament which is intended to be "most comfortable" to those who receive it worthily, feeling their own need, and His great mercy who ordained it as a continual remembrance of His love. Alas, for Gertrude, her heart shrank from it ; but she knew she could not, ought not, refuse ; yet when Rica's hand nestled in hers with its touch of love and sympathy, her heart had no warm, eager response ; she strug-

gled bravely, and I think the Divine Master, who knows our infirmities, accepting the effort, did not refuse His blessing.

"Was our service tedious to your new sister?" asked the young assistant, who had hastened to overtake the party of ladies. It was at Grace's side he had paused, with his hat in hand, but while she sought for a proper reply to his question, Rica turned from where she was walking by her mother's side to say, "No, indeed; Mrs. Everson had an engagement and was obliged to hasten!"

"How I do dislike that man," she added in an undertone. "He is always prying and asking unnecessary questions."

"My child!"

"Well, mother, I hope Trudie won't meet him often, or she will be turned against the Church altogether. I do wish that Doctor Dorman was able to take the service more frequently. Gertrude has been accustomed to an old and dignified gentleman for a minister."

Rica's wrath melted as she recalled with a little smile, good old Doctor Grey's quaint ways and words, and his hardness towards Church people.

Meanwhile Gertrude had hastened on and entered her sister's house only to find the party just

finishing luncheon; she could have cried with mingled vexation and over-wrought emotion.

"It was such a long service, Sylvie!" she exclaimed. "I thought I should be here much earlier. If I had known," she added, in eager repentance, "I should not have gone at all."

Sylvie was very forgiving; but the visitors, who had been abroad and had only just heard the particulars of Gertrude's marriage, were inclined to tease her a little.

"Ah, you have gone over completely, I see, Gertrude."

"But, Mrs. Everson, is it customary among Episcopalians to have such long meetings on week-days? In Lent, I know, but at other times of year?"

"I think so, Mrs. Masson, from what I have learned."

"Well, the Episcopalians are taking on more and more of" (she was about to say "of Romish ideas," but checked herself, remembering that Miss Preston had married an "Episcopalian") "of form and ceremony and open-church doctrine; isn't it so, Mrs. Everson?"

"Well, really I have learned very little about it," replied Gertrude quietly. "I simply endeavor to gratify my husband's family by attending ser-

vice with them whenever I can conveniently do so, but I fully intended to be here in time to see that my Prince was a good little boy and did not eat too many nuts."

She turned the subject with a laugh, caught up the little boy who was following her about, and seemed not to be in any wise disturbed by the remarks and questions of the ladies.

The sisters made a pleasant afternoon for their visitors, but for themselves there was an unrest and a foreboding which marred their happiness and brought the unaccustomed tears when they kissed each other at parting.

XII.

YOUNG Mrs. Everson settled it for herself, in this way: "I will not look them up in my Prayer Book nor count ahead any more; it just upsets everything; if Sylvie wants me, needs me, on any such day, I shall just go to her. If the others want me for Church, and I can conveniently go, I will do so."

She did not see that it was a question of something higher than mere personal "convenience;" she lacked that clear understanding of Christ's Church which alone could make her love and revere it. Would no one see this, and give to her in her need; or must she go on so, loved by such a love that its very strength was its own weakness and her hindrance?

About a week after this sweeping resolution of the young wife, her sister said to her:

"Trudie, we are going to have a 'Halloween' party. You will come and help us enjoy it, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed! I remember one that we went to at Jennie Brower's some years ago; and it was very bright and pleasant. Is this to be your party, Sylvie?"

"Not exactly. It is the 'Aid Circle' of our church. The ladies have undertaken it as a sort of sociable to raise money for the organ fund, and they chose my house as being more central and of a good size."

"Why, it will be lovely!" cried Gertrude, with a touch of her old girlish fun, "and everything must go off successfully; I will put my shoulder to the wheel instantly."

"Oh, I shall be so glad if you will, dear; then I shall have no fear for anything."

They began, forthwith, to plan a sort of outline programme for the entertainment. It was like old times to see the two pretty heads bent over paper and pencil, while a flow of question and answer, suggestion and laughter, filled the hour with dainty feminine music.

The maid put her head in at the door to receive an order, and went hastily to the kitchen, brimful of news: "Wasn't the Misthress after givin' a large party? and wasn't she and Miss Thrudie makin' out a list of things to be got for the refreshment table? and wasn't it a lovely thing to see the two of 'em

'at it,' just like as they used to do before Miss Thrude got married?" and so on, until she was compelled to pause for breath, and gave cook a chance to put in a word. "Who was to serve the supper?" that was her inquiry, and the maid could not tell; she thought matters had not progressed so far as that; so they were obliged to wait further developments "above stairs."

It was late when Gertrude started for home, her face bright and flushed with pleasant anticipations.

"I guess, dear, you might not speak of it just yet—not perhaps until the invitations are sent out. I don't know exactly how those matters will be arranged."

"All right, dear, no one is ever inquisitive!" responded the young wife, hastening away to be in time to dress for dinner before Elwood came.

She had only "run in" at her old home that morning, not intending any visit, but had spent the day there.

As she walked briskly through the crisp October air, her thoughts reverted to the last words of her sister.

No, she was never troubled by any curiosity nor questioning on the part of her husband's relatives. She could have borne more of it with perfect com-

posure. Indeed, she sometimes longed for a little home-like inquisitiveness, such as is common between sisters. Rica alone ever ventured anything of that sort, and she with such a delicate tact, such a loving care that it seemed almost formal. Yet she loved Rica fondly, and hoped soon to get back to that old school-day freedom of question and speech which once had existed between them.

That something was going on the mother and sisters suspected by the many visits and the frequent messages between Gertrude and Sylvie, but they did not really know what it was, until a few days previous to the affair, when Mrs. Yates herself asked them informally to come to her house on "Halloween."

There was very little said. Mrs. Everson thanked her visitor for her daughters and herself, but did not say whether or not they would accept, and Mrs. Yates, noticing this omission, was too proud to press the matter further.

At the dinner table that evening, Gertrude told her husband about it, and in Sylvie's name asked him to go.

"I hope the others will go!" she said, glancing from him to those about the table, when for the first time she discovered that her own brightness

was in no wise reflected upon the faces of her husband's relatives.

"Let me see," Elwood was saying when she looked back to him. His eyes were on his plate, except as he raised them to hers now and then while he spoke. "Let me see—my dear, what day in the week is that? I must certainly try to go with you. We will talk it over together by-and-by. What an indefatigable worker our sister is!" with a clear pronunciation of the personal pronoun that made his wife's heart thrill with a proud gladness.

"Yes, indeed! Sylvie is so thoroughly unselfish in it all, too. No matter how troublesome or difficult an undertaking is, if it will do any good to any one, she is ready for it!"

The young wife, conscious that a little shadow had crossed her sunshine, yet spoke brightly and with gentle pleasure agreed to her husband's praises of Sylvie.

For the others, they had heard Elwood's calm "We will talk it over together," and knew what it meant. Therefore, though they said little, they honestly tried to keep under their perturbed emotions, and to help in making the meal a cheerful one.

There were always subjects enough in this well-

educated, well-read household, and usually sufficient judgment and tact, as also Christian forbearance, to prevent any unpleasant silence when a certain topic must be left untouched. There was a late book to be discussed, some new music—oratorio or opera—a popular question or a Church subject; always something of which one or another availed herself readily, and so the smooth flow of conversation was kept unchecked, and no discordant note broke the general household harmony.

Gertrude Everson thought her husband unusually quiet and absorbed all that evening. She tried to conjecture what the trouble was.

Did it not seem as if all of Sylvie's plans and projects met with cool refusal or disfavor? No one ever seemed enthusiastic over them. Her Sylvie, who was ever so thoughtful for others, so kind and generous! Why was it? But she determined to be just, not to make herself unhappy by any unwarranted conclusions.

The somewhat lengthy evening was over at last, prayers were read, and with a cheery "good night" Gertrude passed to her room.

Elwood was even more loving and gentle than usual. Was he going to hurt her by refusing Sylvie's invitation? Oh, if he would but speak!

She did not know how hard it was for him to do

so. She made a brave effort and went to him as he sat putting together some scattered papers from his desk. Taking a low seat and resting her clasped hands upon his arm, she smiled up into his face—one of her own bright smiles which lighted every feature.

"I know I am very impatient, Elwood, but I do so want to know if you can go!"

How pretty she looked to him as he turned toward her! Her unbound hair caught the light in its wavy folds. It lay upon his hand as he put his arm about her, and its touch thrilled him.

"'There's magic in the web of it!'" he said, with an effort at playfulness, caressing with a wondrous tenderness the shining tresses. "They are like the golden threads of love which bind me fast —fast! Oh, my darling, I wish there might never come a question between us!"

"But, Elwood, it shall not come between us, you know! Nothing ever shall! Tell me just what you think, and what you want, and I shall be quite satisfied. I trust my husband wholly."

She lifted her head proudly, and her clear eyes looked steadfastly into his.

"Thank you, dear wife; now I will try to tell you."

Then, with great pains and gentleness he explained to her how "Halloween" preceded the most sweet and holy Feast of All Saints, how the Church cherished that festival as one most solemn and sacred, yearly numbering her departed ones and praying for grace to follow on in the way made beautiful by so great and noble an army.

"It has become to us even more sacred since my father's death, as it always is to those who have seen their dear ones pass away, and it has been my custom each year, after service, to accompany my mother and sisters to my father's grave, which they make bright with flowers, in token of our hope beyond this life and our faith in that Lord who is the Resurrection and the Life."

"Oh! why did they not tell me?" she broke in excitedly. "How could they leave me in ignorance? It was not kind! I am so sorry!"

He passed his hand fondly over her head, which rested upon his shoulder.

"There, darling, it is all right; there is no harm. All Hallow Eve has long been a time for gatherings and friendly joys; it is not wrong; you must go and enjoy the evening with your sister and friends, and let me come quietly in for half an hour or so before you break up. If only you and I

were concerned, my wife, I should unquestionably spend the whole evening with you, but you know we must often consider others whom our actions might affect."

"But, Elwood, you need not come at all; Stewart will bring me home, and I don't think I care to go at all without you. I have become interested in it so through helping Sylvie, but I had rather stay with you here."

"Think how disappointed your sister Sylvie would be, and all the rest, if you were not there. Oh no, I think it is your duty to fulfil this engagement, dear, and I shall be glad to meet you there at the close of the evening. Then—" he hesitated, he wanted her to feel entirely free to choose for herself; yet oh how his heart would yearn for her on the coming day of holy and tender memories.

"Well, my husband, what then?"

She too hesitated; she wondered if he cared, if he would want her then. She had not known his father; the day had no sacred memories for her; would she not intrude upon his solemn hours? Alas, for these two who were "so near and yet so far"! What would yet be needed to clear away that little mist of doubt that they might speak heart to heart?

"Well, darling, if you would—if you cared to be with us at service and afterwards, it would make me so glad to have you."

"Would it? Then if you think I should not be to the others as an intruder, I will go with you."

XIII.

A PARTY! A Presbyterian party! And on the Eve of All Saints' Day! I wonder at Elwood, I do certainly wonder at him."

"But, Sarah, many Church people attend those festivities; it is a very ancient sort of pastime, and—"

"Being ancient does not necessarily make a thing right," suggested Grace, rather snappishly.

"I have noticed that it often covers a multitude of sins though," replied Rica with a touch of sarcasm in her manner, "and I was about to say, Sarah, that the fact of the party being 'Presbyterian,' as you call it, only adds to its propriety; for the object is to help in furnishing the Sunday School room; and that you'll allow is a good motive."

"Very good and proper for those people, Rica, but not for Church members!"

"Dear me, how wrong it all was! I wonder what Elwood will agree to next. This marrying a—"

"Sh—!"

A light step outside the door interrupted the excited talk and Gertrude entered, music in hand. She could not help noticing the awkward pause, the sudden silence which seemed to have fallen among them at her appearance, and the tell-tale looks upon their faces.

A proud and defiant color flashed in her cheeks.

Had not her husband said she was right? Had they not settled it all between them and agreed perfectly, so that no least shade had come over their love? Why then should others trouble themselves about the matter, as these were evidently doing? What right had any one to discuss the actions and the decisions of a husband and wife?

All this passed through her mind in an instant, as she walked to the piano, where she placed her music upon the rack, and then saying, "Excuse me for intruding upon your conversation," passed quickly from the room.

It had all been so sudden that not one of the sisters had regained composure enough to say a word. Indeed, what could be said? They knew very well that Gertrude understood the whole matter.

"How absurd! Why couldn't some one go on talking, saying something?" exclaimed Grace.

"Well I don't know that it matters much after all," said Mrs. Richards, sighing wearily; we are not children, we are too old to sit still and see our only brother, our pride and joy, drawn away from the accustomed paths of rectitude and wisdom without uttering a protest. Gertrude knew what she was doing when she married a Churchman; she understood all our feelings upon such subjects, and all our habits and wishes; I don't therefore see any reason that we should seal our lips before her now and let her drag Elwood into unprofitable ways while we sigh to one another behind the scenes."

"Well if your plan is to find fault with Trudie and make her unhappy, there has been a very good beginning made this morning," said Rica, whose heart was a perfect cauldron of tumultuous and seething emotions, now one feeling uppermost, now another.

The door opened again, and Mrs. Everson the elder came in, looking greatly troubled.

"Girls, I hope you have not been speaking unkindly to Gertrude, I met her on the stairs and she was so strange and quiet."

They told her how it had been.

"I am sorry, very sorry, my children."

"But mother—" began the eldest daughter, again offering her opinion that no more "hushing up" should be done, that matters should be freely discussed before and with Gertrude, in which opinion, Jessie fully coincided.

"Elwood's wife will never be drawn into the Church by our discussions," said Rica sarcastically.

"No, discussions are dangerous things, quiet and constant example is far more effective," said the mother. "You are too impatient, my children. Do you remember yesterday's Collect?"

Jessie smiled, and shook her head.

"Why, mother dear, how can we live in 'unity of spirit' with a Presbyterian?"

There was a scornful ring in her voice which made her mother's heart sad.

"Besides, mother, were we not told in yesterday's Epistle that it was our duty to 'contend earnestly for the faith?' It seems that we must have some contention."

"Yes, Christ's Church may live in such unity of spirit together, and may so contend with loving zeal for what is held most precious, that those who stand outside shall be impressed and shall desire to become a part of that beautiful temple, acceptable unto God."

They very well knew the truth of their mother's words, and their own duty as members of that holy body, but alas, it was so easy to be tempted, to be made indignant, to be impatient and ungenerous! It was hard to feel the old, sweet, peaceful routine broken in upon, that hand-in-hand walk and worship which they had known from their childhood. Yet were it not far better to draw in this one by love and gentleness, than to stand looking ever with grieved eyes at that old flowery path which stretched through sunshine from the baptismal font down to the present, with scarcely a shadow to touch its freshness and beauty?

Oh Rica, Rica, why did you ever bring the pretty bird in to flutter among the branches of the stately old household tree, to find her mate waiting in patient silence for her there?

Gertrude was not in at lunch time, nor did any one see her until dinner was announced and she and Elwood came in together. Every one glanced unconsciously at the husband to see "if he knew," but no, his calm face wore its own pleasant look, and he spoke cheerfully and unconstrainedly.

Mrs. Everson asked Gertrude about Sylvie and the baby, and all things seemed to have fallen into the accustomed smooth routine, but there was a scarcely-perceptible difference in Gertrude, a tinge

of hardness in her manner which certainly had hitherto been lacking. Rica was the first to notice it. "It is the beginning," she said to herself prophetically. It was true. The slighting of Sylvie's invitation (for no word had been spoken about it in her presence, and only a formal "regret" sent) and the interrupted sisterly conclave, at which she understood perfectly that she was the culprit upon whom sentence was being passed, these two things had made the drop of bitterness in her cup, which would not henceforth recover its lost sweetness.

"It was a mistake," she was saying to herself during all the dinner hour; "one ought never to come into a man's home when he has sisters; I could have loved his Church long ago, but they have made me heartily sick of it all."

While she was thinking these things, she spoke quietly, even cheerfully, accepted or refused what was offered her with her usual politeness, and only Rica and the mother noticed that undefinable change, that sort of stoical look which had come over her brightness, as though she were making herself ready to endure. Yes, one other saw it: her husband; but he thought she must be tired; she always wanted to do so much for every one that he feared she had undertaken more than her strength warranted in this Hallow Eve affair, but

he had no fear of anything deeper than this. He supposed of course that mother and "the girls" had talked it all over with Gertrude, given their reasons for declining Sylvie's invitation, and settled the whole affair amicably.

The busy days went by, and the Hallow Eve came, fair and beautiful.

"Promise me not to overtax yourself, my Gertrude," said her husband, as she followed him to the door for the morning good-bye.

"I promise you, dear; you will see how bright I shall be to-night."

He looked with a yearning fondness into her shining eyes. Ah! how he prayed that no cloud might ever come over that brightness. He did not like that look in her eyes, he thought it meant too much excitement and need of rest.

"She shall have a rest, at all events," he decided; "before the winter fairly sets in, with all its gayeties and its constant excitement, we will go away somewhere together—just Gertrude and I—to some quiet, restful spot, and have no one to interfere with us. Perhaps to H——, among the hills, and by the mill river, with its quaint, old-fashioned houses and peaceful scenery."

While he thus fondly planned, his wife was debating with herself whether she should go away

for all day too, or wait until after lunch. She knew that she ought to stay, but she wanted to go. While she hesitated, Rica came to speak to her.

"Trudie dear, have we vexed you?" she asked softly, with tears in her eyes.

"I think it is I who have vexed you, Rica."

"I am not vexed. It seems to me quite easy and right for us all to live together and generously allow one another to do and think as seems best to each."

"You always were a dear, large-hearted girl," said Gertrude, smiling a little sadly into her young sister's eyes, "and I hope you will always love me, Rica?"

"Always, always! Trudie, you and I will stay the same old friends, no matter what comes." And after that Gertrude resolved to stay until after lunch.

When she was alone again, Gertrude took up her little Prayer Book, and turned to the service for All Saints' Day. She felt more gentle since Rica's visit to her room, and as she read, the tears gathered in her eyes.

"No wonder they love the day," she said softly, "but why did they not tell me so, and why not speak of it as one Christian should to another, in-

stead of standing aloof and looking at me with horror just because I go to try and please my sister and enjoy an evening with her and her friends? It is quite natural that they should not care for such an eve of a solemn memory day; but they shouldn't expect all the world to think like them. If I could remember my father or my mother, it would be different, but Sylvie has been my mother," she added, the force of indignant feeling coming back, "and I shall certainly try to please her always.

> "For she is a living saint,
> And all the rest are dead,"

she said aloud, with a laugh lighting her clouded face.

Had she been indeed a Churchwoman, filled with all the sweet and holy memories of its saints and martyrs from her childhood, as the beautiful years brought season of feast and fast close following each other, she never could have uttered such a couplet.

XIV.

ELWOOD EVERSON carried a heavy heart on that Eve of All Saints; he would not have acknowledged it to any one, he scarcely allowed it to himself, but there certainly was a mote in his sunbeam that would not grow less, though he fought it bravely.

A trouble unspoken rankles and is magnified; brought out to the air and sunlight, looked at fairly from all points, it grows more bearable, decreases possibly, at least shows clear and fair for what it is. This trouble was worse to Elwood, worse to all of them, because no one spoke openly of it. If indeed there had been plain, kindly and sympathetic speech together, the trouble would rapidly have melted away; but now there it stood, quite real and terrible, staring them in the face; a small thing upon which the silence acted like a fog, whose tendency is to enlarge to huge proportions all that comes within its reach.

Elwood sighed and straightened himself in the

keen, clear air of the autumn night, as if to rid himself of any sense of burden, and hastened on to meet the woman he loved best of all the world.

She was looking very fair and girlish when his eyes fell upon her among the bevy of bright women. She was helping in some game with the young folks, and he heard one of the girls say, "Oh Mrs. Everson, how beautifully you manage it!" Then a sudden feeling thrilled her, and she looked up quickly, across the intervening group of faces, into her husband's eyes. There was no mistaking the gladness of her look; and it touched the quiet, strong man deeply.

In a minute she was at his side, and her soft voice was saying, "How glad I am, Elwood; it has been a long evening, without you." It was truer than he knew. It was the first evening they had spent apart from each other since their marriage, and it had revealed to Gertrude how strongly her life was bound up in his, how little good there was in anything unshared by him.

She had thought to enter into all the joy of this evening in her old way; the mirth and music and brightness had seemed very attractive to her as she looked forward to them, but little by little, as the moments passed by, she began to realize that a want, a lack seemed to be in everything: a

change had come into her whole life. She was no more a gay girl content and pleased with girlish joys, but a woman with a true man's love in her keeping; one whose life had enlarged and deepened while yet it centred more upon one.

"Apart from my husband, there is no real joy for me," she said to herself, at last fully comprehending it all.

And once, when her sister came upon her standing alone by a quiet window, she said, "Why, Sylvie, I want my husband; it isn't any pleasure, at all, without him. I—why—I did not know—" she broke off, with a little quivering smile, and Sylvie put her arms about her saying softly, "Of course! Don't I know, and am I not glad? I could not wish you to be happy without him."

That sensible young woman straightway made up her mind that whatever Churchly interference might henceforth keep Gertrude from taking part in any plan of her own, she would not complain so long as the young wife were one with her husband in all things.

The short remainder of the evening's pleasure passed, and Gertrude and her huband took their way homeward together, each far more contented and happy than they had been for some days.

Gertrude did not know what had passed between her husband and his sisters that evening during her absence. She did not imagine that the first approach to any bitterness had occurred in their conversation together that evening—these who had lived always in such unity and harmony. She did not dream what a dark cloud her glad words of love had lightened when she met him with her fond greeting an hour previous. She only knew that she was very happy by his side, and that there her true, best life must work itself out, a part of his life. She did not say much, for her husband was somewhat quiet, and she thought he was recalling the past and the dear ones who had gone; but she promised herself that "to-morrow nothing shall come to mar his day. I will go with him, and the girls will see I can appreciate the beauty of their solemn services!"

Alas, the morrow was destined to be a failure! It was a rare day, with that soft haze over all the land which makes the tenderness of nature, answering to the tenderness of our hearts, at this time of sweet and holy memories. Gertrude stood at her husband's side, in the breakfast room listening to his explanation about the "Summer of All Saints," when the others came in. Their good-mornings to Gertrude were cold

and constrained, when she meant to have given an especial warmth.

They had not met since she had hurried away after luncheon on the previous day, and she had naturally expected somewhat more of a greeting than usual, but though Rica went to her with her customary kiss, even she said nothing and appeared to be under some sort of restraint.

Mrs. Everson's usual calm seemed slightly disturbed, though she made the only remark to Gertrude having reference to the Halloween party.

"Did you enjoy yourself last night, Gertrude?" she asked as she sent her a cup of coffee.

"Thank you, mother, not nearly as much as I had imagined I should. I felt lost without my husband, and did not seem to get the real good of anything until he came."

She smiled brightly, and the look of answering love in Elwood's face as he turned towards her only seemed to increase the bitterness in his sisters' hearts.

"I hope you two will always find your best enjoyment together, it is the true way for husband and wife," replied the elderly lady cheerfully, and with a glance at her "children," as if to say, "Let that atone for all."

"I did not realize how much I needed my husband until I was trying to enjoy myself apart from him!" exclaimed the young wife smiling, yet with a great longing at her heart, to flee away with that husband anywhere where they might be alone together, just they two!

"A pity you hadn't realized it in time to save him from attending a Presbyterian party on the Eve of All Saints' Day," said Jessie, with a little laugh that was almost a sneer.

"Why, Jessie!" exclaimed Rica, while the color flashed into Gertrude's face, and all the half-forgotten, wholly-repented bitterness came back to her heart.

There was a moment's silence. Elwood was not a hasty man. He sat looking into his sister Jessie's face, with sad, wondering eyes, as if trying to realize how she could be so cruel. Then a low voice, sweet in its very repression and its effort after calmness, said, "Jessie, would it not have been better in every way, more sisterly, more kind, and wise, and helpful, if you had spoken to me of your wishes in this matter, had told me of the customs and the prejudices of your family, of your Church; and then had left me to choose my plan of action, having a clear light upon all sides?"

She had gone on bravely, calm and gentle to the very last word, with her clear, honest eyes looking full into Jessie's own. But when she had finished, a sudden trembling seized her, and with a feeling that she must get away she rose quickly and left the room.

"I hope you see now, mother, in whose heart dwells the most generosity!" said Elwood in low, quiet tones, as he rose and followed his wife, not deigning to bestow a look or a word upon Jessie.

"Oh, my children! my children!" exclaimed the mother sorrowfully, while poor Rica broke down and cried like a child.

"She's right! Trudie's right! We ought to have spoken about it! How could she know about our ways and the Church days and all that?"

"I should think Elwood ought to have told her something!"

"And he supposed that we had told her. It was all a mistake."

"Well then let us make the best of it. Jessie has had her say and Gertrude has had hers, and now the best way is to get over it quietly and go on as usual," said Mrs. Richards.

"I suppose we must expect to have little disagreements now and then, mother; when a brother, and an only brother too, brings his wife in the

family, one can't hope to have things just as they were before, be she ever so good a woman! We are all faulty, and we must learn to bear with one another. Come now, don't let us have our day spoiled!"

"I don't see any help for it," said Grace, with a sad little smile. "It is about as spoiled already as any day could well be, and such a day!"

XV.

HALF an hour later a soft knock was heard at Gertrude's door. Her husband opened it and found his mother.

"How is Gertrude?" and without waiting for a reply, "I think she is tired and over-excited, she has been doing so much of late. If she will let me, I want to stay with her while you all go to service."

While she spoke, her son led her slowly into the room, where his wife came forward instantly. Her face had traces of tears still and was quite pale, but she smiled and answered gently, "You are very kind, mother, and I thank you, but I want to go to service with you if I may. I was a little tired perhaps and foolish, but I shall be all right after a little walk in the morning air."

Elwood watched her proudly as she spoke in her own winning way. Who could help loving her? he wondered.

His stately mother bent over and kissed the pale face of her daughter-in-law, and a great feeling of

relief came to her at the thought that after all no one would be kept from service on that day of sacred recollections, and that possibly too this time of trouble and irritation might open to a broader, brighter relationship between them all.

"My dear, brave little daughter! come with us, do, and make our circle complete. No thank you, my son, I will not sit down, for I must hasten with my morning duties or I shall be late. If you and Gertrude are ready first, do not wait for us, but walk on by yourselves. It is a lovely morning and the air will do you good, dear, I hope."

The peace-loving mother passed out. She had purposely arranged that the husband and wife should walk on together ahead of the others, because she knew they would be happier so and she knew too that her son's sense of loyalty and deference to her would induce him to wait, unless she herself established some such precedent. That son, though true as man could be to his wife and loving her as well as woman need wish to be loved, had never yet failed in attention and respect to this mother.

The knowledge of this made Mrs. Everson perfectly satisfied both for the present and the future,

and also made her eager for any special pleasure which could be enjoyed by the young wife and husband together.

It is only the very truest men who can win such mother love and confidence.

Gertrude and Elwood started early, walking leisurely along together, enjoying the soft hazy beauty of the day.

"It is a sort of sad beauty which makes nature accord so well with our feelings at this time of sweet, sorrowful remembrance," said Elwood. "I am counting a great deal, my dear, upon your appreciation of our services to-day."

"I feel quite sure that I shall enjoy them, Elwood, for what I read in my Prayer Book impressed me as being very beautiful. But oh!" she added with the least awakening of her old gay humor, "I do hope we shall have the old rector and not that young assistant!"

He smiled, taking more note of the cheerfulness of her look and tone than of what she said.

The Eversons had two pews, one which had always been owned by the family and a second one which Elwood had rented just before his marriage. This was situated just behind the family pew, and here he and Gertrude sat at an early hour that morning, enjoying the restful stillness of the great

church, and feeling the influence of all the hallowed and beautiful surroundings.

More than one prayer had gone up from Gertrude's heart as she sat there, for strength to forgive and for a generous Christian love towards her sisters-in-law. She thought she had conquered and could be at peace until they all came in, Jessie's face wearing that placid, self-satisfied half-smile which is always so aggravating.

Mrs. Everson took the foot of the pew and Jessie sat at the head. They were reverent people, but Gertrude noticed Jessie in particular, whose outward tokens of devotion annoyed her, as they need not have done except for that half-quenched angry indignation in her own heart.

It is easy to taunt and say "Oh yes, if these people who bow and kneel so much, who use so many forms of reverence, were only half as good in their lives as their manners would indicate," but are we to be the judges of these things? Did the Master set us to watch His children's devotion, to see if it be real or feigned? Have we not enough to do to watch and guard our own lives, keeping them from Pharisaism and formality?

Rica had longed to sit in her brother's pew, on the other side of Gertrude, but she was afraid of

any least movement which might stir up the spirit of envy or strife which seemed, alas, so easily roused. Gertrude noticed the sadness in her face, and knew that there was another troubled heart in God's house, that morning.

Then came the organ notes, dim and distant, heralding the sweet singers, and Gertrude, taking the Hymnal from her husband's hands, saw that the processional was that glorious anthem which, if anything of human wording can, lifts the soul away from sordid thoughts and cares into the higher life of God's true servants——

> "For all the saints who from their labors rest,
> Who Thee, by faith, before the world confess'd,
> Thy name, O Jesus, be forever bless'd.
> Alleluia!"

A faint glimmering of the true idea of All Saints' Day began to shine in her heart. She looked at the white-robed chorister boys, with their bright young faces. What did they know of life's warfare, its struggles through "darkness drear"? What indeed had she herself, with her twenty years of home joy and peace and love—what had even she known of it all, until within the last few months, since she had entered upon womanhood's strange sweet path?

At the foot of the procession she saw with a feeling of delight the gray-haired rector, his calm face uplifted and touched with the "peace which passeth all understanding." How grand yet how humble he looked! As he passed close by the front pews, she heard his voice joining in the words—

> "Soon, soon, to faithful warriors, comes the rest;
> Sweet is the calm of Paradise the bless'd,"

and looking into his face she somehow seemed to know how his heart thrilled at the thought of that "rest." No doubts troubled him, no fears, only a few more days of the faithful struggle, and then the cross forever laid down at the Master's feet and the entering into His rest!

Gertrude forgot Jessie, there at the head of the pew; forgot the unkind words and her own anger as the service went on. The young assistant read the lessons, and read them well too, notwithstanding Gertrude's prejudice against him. But when the Communion Service came, a stranger read the Epistle, his strong, clear voice reaching the far corners of the great church. How wonderful it was! She shut her eyes to listen as the trumpet-like tones called out one after another of the "twelve thousand;" and it seemed almost as if

she could see, as he read, that "great multitude which no man could number" standing "before the Throne and before the Lamb."

Then, as if mortals might be too visionary and dwell too much upon glorious scenes which took them away from the present battle-ground of life, the rector followed with the Beatitudes of life's Master, who knew our infirmities and encouraged us so to fight on unto the end—

"'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'"

She did not think of Jessie nor of Mrs. Richards, but of herself as of one most needy of this grace of meekness.

There was yet the most trying ordeal of all to be met. When Doctor Dorman began to read the Exhortation in his slow, solemn way, the heart of the young wife failed her. It was something so much more real, more searching than anything to which she had ever been accustomed, that she dared not go forward while the remnant of that anger burned within her. She was not "in love and charity with all," she knew that well enough; she did not want to kneel at Jessie's side and partake of those most holy mysteries. No, it was too soon; she was not prepared.

As they knelt for silent prayer, she whispered

to Elwood, "I cannot go, dear; go without me."

His hand sought hers, holding it in his strong clasp as they knelt together. Was not that higher love far, far beyond anything which this earthly life had given her, and could she not follow where that called? But—"so is the danger great, if ye receive the same unworthily," she repeated, with that shrinking of an honest heart from anything which seemed not perfectly upright.

Elwood looked at her as he rose to go forward. Her hand fell from his clasp and she shook her head, bending low over her Prayer Book to hide her quivering lips and tearful eyes as the whole Everson family except herself knelt to receive together the emblems of a Saviour's dying love.

She did not see one and another of the sisters turn to look wonderingly at her as they left their pew. She only knew that her husband had gone to that sacred feast without her.

XVI.

AS might be expected, Gertrude's action at church did not tend to make matters more pleasant at home. Rica and her mother tried to keep things smooth and friendly, avoiding those topics upon which all did not think alike, but their efforts could not restore harmony to the atmosphere where once unkind words, narrow and ungenerous thoughts, had breathed their chill breath.

Elwood resolved that he would take his wife immediately away, for a little change.

"I will take you to a spot which I am sure you will admire, though it is away from cities and all modern civilization," he said to her.

That is just what I should most enjoy, I am altogether tired of civilization; but, Elwood, you must not go on my account, I would not have you leave your business and perhaps have it to regret afterwards."

"Well, you see, my dear, this is my business; it

is in my route exactly; and I shall combine business with pleasure this time. The mills are at H—— and I go up there occasionally to look after things; it is to my mind a most charming spot, and I have often longed for such a companion as you, dear, when I have been there."

So it came to pass that in the early days of November the husband and wife went away to H——.

"I am afraid we have become dreadfully demoralized, mother," sighed Mrs. Richards, as the pair drove away and Gertrude's face, pale yet striving after its old bright smile, looked back at them.

"What do you mean, Sarah?" demanded Jessie, not without a twinge of conscience.

"That we have soiled the fair white garment of our household unity by dissension and strife; that we have made our little sister-in-law unhappy and ourselves no less so, to say nothing of our only brother, and that just when the new husband and wife ought to be settling down to a cozy and comfortable winter, joyous as two birds in a nest—we have sent them off seeking for rest and happiness elsewhere!"

She spoke half in jest, yet she was sufficiently in earnest to show a dimness in her eyes and to have a decided break in her voice.

"Nonsense!" replied Jessie. "We are just the same as ever, or shall be now that we are by ourselves again; it is the coming of a stranger into the family that has wrought the change; we need not have expected anything else, I certainly did not!"

"Possibly poor little Gertrude expected something rather more kind and affectionate," said Rica bitterly.

Her mother put her arm about her youngest girl and said, "Gently, my daughter, do not allow yourselves to speak so to one another, my children; talk freely, but do not say bitter and sarcastic things. To tell the truth, I fear that Sarah is only too right! God has put us to the test, my children, and we have failed. Let us think it over and try if we cannot do better in the future."

"I do not believe we shall ever make Gertrude a Churchwoman, she is too deeply-dyed in Presbyterianism."

"Jessie, I know better than that. Trude and I have always been intimate, always at least until this break, and I know very well that she had not a strong personal attachment to the Presbyterian creed; it was simply with her a matter of birth and education. I often spoke to her about the Church, and about certain things in the Prayer

Book before her marriage, and found her interested. There was not a grain of bigotry in her, and if she does not learn to care for the Church, it will be because—because we show her how unkind and ungenerous its people can be."

Rica followed her mother's advice and tried to speak calmly. She felt that she had known her sister-in-law longer and more intimately than the others and was privileged to speak plainly.

"It is hard to know just how to act in such cases," said Mrs. Richards. "We certainly cannot, must not, act slightingly towards the Church! I don't see any medium way."

"A pity you couldn't, Sarah—some half-way system between the Church and Presbyterianism," sneered Jessie, then, "Oh, forgive me, mother! I don't mean to displease you, but it is hard; you know how Wood and I have always gone side by side to and from Church ever since Sarah was married, and now see how he is slipping away from me."

"Oh, but you know very well, dear, you slipped away from him first and took up with a certain Mr. Allan Brewster," cried Grace mischievously, glad to have an opportunity of making a slight diversion and bringing a smile to each of the perplexed faces.

Mr. Allan Brewster was the gentleman to whom Jessie was engaged to be married. He was a zealous Churchman and a pleasant man enough; but his business affairs were in that uncertain state which forbade his marrying very soon. The waiting and the uncertainty appeared to have somewhat worn upon Jessie, as was shown by the bitter speeches and sarcasm in which she indulged. It takes a rare woman to wait and lose no sweetness nor freshness thereby. Jessie was only an ordinary woman.

Meantime Elwood and his wife are happy together; having left all controversy and questioning behind, each one is looking forward to a quiet enjoyment of the other's society.

"What matters it where," says Gertrude to herself, "in the mountains or in the valley, it is all one to me if only my husband is with me and will speak to me unbiased by the thought of what his sisters would say."

And yet, when they had left the noisy train and had clambered into the old-fashioned stage which started on a slow climb over rough ways, she could not wholly repress her words of delight at the beautiful scenery which came into view at every step: wild and rugged, with the still glory of the sunset over it all, it seemed to give her peace.

Through the woods, crossing the winding, rushing, impatient little river half a dozen times, and hearing it here and there plash over the rocks, they at length came to the modest village, with its vine-covered houses and its grey stone church.

Gertrude never forgot her first sight of the church tower, with its cross and the grave-yard below. The setting sun shone first upon the cross and then down to the white stones; all of these (the cross and the stones) stood facing the east, in the reverent old time style, and the fading light of the November day fell over all with a strange, peaceful glory.

Both husband and wife had something of the same thought come to them as they gazed upon the peculiar beauty of the scene. "It is the cross and the grave after all which go to make up the whole, and if we can only get that glory to light them both, we shall have peace at last and a sure hope of that which lies beyond."

Not far off they finally alighted, and entered the pleasant, rustic hotel. There were no other passengers to stop there, though a few people of quiet or artistic tastes still lingered at the hotel, lengthening out their time of rest, of convalescence or of delightful labor.

Gertrude drew a long breath and looked into her husband's face with a smile.

"It is so good, Elwood, so good!"

"What, my darling?" he asked, more to hear her talk than because he did not understand.

"Oh, the peace and the beauty and the harmony. One couldn't fret and be cross here!"

"It would seem not, and one might perhaps gain strength here for the worries and vexations which come down in the busy world; don't you think so, my little wife?"

"Perhaps; I will try, at all events," she added humbly.

"We will both try," he said, putting his arm about her as they stood breathing in the fragrant evening air and listening to the distant plash of water.

"To-morrow we will go to the mills. I think you will be pleased to see everything, although it is rather late in the season for the country to be looking its prettiest."

As Gertrude expressed an interest, he told her something about his business: how he had known the old mill always, and as a boy had visited here often; how the business had come into his hands at his father's death and how as it had grown largely he had deemed it well to build a new mill

near the old one, how he generally came to the place himself at least twice a year, and found it the pleasantest part of the year's work, "a sort of holiday, in fact." He told her, also, something of how the little village had grown, how the people were chiefly English or a better class of Irish, and that they had wanted a church, "an Episcopal Church you know, dear," he explained, that she might perfectly comprehend, and that he had seen the Bishop, and had a young missionary sent there, and what good work he had done.

But he did not tell her all—all that she was to learn, some day, for herself—how he himself had done the most for the place, had really made the plans for the little stone church building; and had by his own gifts and among his personal friends raised sufficient money to free it from any debt. The burial-ground was an ancient one, to which the old inhabitants were greatly attached; and they had wanted the church placed near it.

"Oh, we must see the church, too! Can we not, Elwood? Shall we stay over Sunday?" she asked eagerly.

And his heart was very glad as he answered, "We certainly will if you like."

It was almost like a second wedding trip, only that the June roses had changed to November's

frost-tinted leaves, and the night air was so cool that they could not sit in it, but must walk to and fro, and she must have a warm wrap, and Elwood must ask ever and anon, "Are you sure you are warm enough, dear?"

All that only made it more pleasant.

"We will have some long drives, and you shall have a good view of all the beauties."

"Can you get a horse here?"

"Yes, I have one here for the superintendent's use; and they take excellent care of it for me. They have always called it my horse, but now it shall be called yours," and he revolved in his mind how proud he would be to let the simple-hearted village people see his pretty young wife and how her sweet words and bright smile would win their love immediately.

XVII.

IT was all just as he had pleased himself in thinking. There was no disappointment here at least. November was kind to them; she kept her sweet mantle of haze over all; she brought no rude storms to interfere with their walks and rides, or to mar the beauty of the dying year.

"The mills" were only a pleasant walk from the hotel, but, as they were to go much further, they drove, and Gertrude was well pleased to see with what care the handsome horse and the carriage had been kept, and the pride with which they were brought to the "young master;" Elwood's father having been in the same business, he would always be "the young master" to all the mill hands.

What a picture indeed was that old mill to Gertrude's eyes, used to city sights and to "fashionable" summer resorts! Elwood himself had romance enough and sufficient attachment to the spot where he had played as a boy, when visiting

there with his father, to keep all about the old mill as unchanged as possible.

"Let the new one do the hard work with the modern appliances," he said, "but let this old one stand as an honored friend, respected for the good it has done and the beauty which it keeps so fresh all about it."

"Why, Elwood, I had no idea you were so full of sentiment!" cried his wife, looking well pleased at the discovery.

"Oh, you haven't begun to know me yet, my dear," he answered lightly; then, with a more serious aspect and a lower voice, "You have not yet even found out how well I love you!"

"Is it so, dear?"

She looked up, her lips trembling with emotion.

"I ought to be a very happy woman! I am!" she added, with her bright smile, and certainly at that precise time she was.

While Elwood talked with the superintendent, Gertrude was noticing the children who were playing about on the grassy slopes or sailing tiny home-made boats on what they called "the pond."

There was a certain gentle timidity about the ways of these little ones which pleased Mrs. Everson and made her think longingly of her own small "Prince." She made acquaintance with

them, and asked them many questions about their lives and occupations, "Did they go to Sunday School?" Oh yes! every one of them; and Archie could say his Catechism all through; and Milly had a beautiful Prayer Book for saying the Collect perfectly every Sunday in the year.

"And who gave Milly the beautiful Prayer Book?" asked Mrs. Everson.

"Oh, Doctor Price, ma'am! He's our minister," and a pretty look of pride came upon all the young faces at the mention of "our minister," each one appeared as if he or she had some special story about Doctor Price which would be told without very much persuasion.

So Mrs. Everson became much interested in "our minister," and was more than ever anxious to remain over a Sunday there, and to see the inside of the pretty little stone church.

One of the hands is quite ill, they tell me, dear, and I want to go and see him. Would you like to drive there with me?"

"Why certainly, Elwood, I am pleased to know and to have a share in all that interests you, and if you don't let me, I shall set up a rival interest among these little new friends of mine," she said merrily, nodding to the children, who were quite captivated by her sweet smile and her pretty face.

He smiled, and called good-bye to the children, speaking to several by name.

"Those are real children, Gertrude, boys and girls whom nature and nature's God have kept pure and simple and true; there is a deal of pleasure in talking with them."

"Yes, I discovered that; I have had quite a charming little conversation with them."

It was in one of the small white cottages which formed what was termed the "mill village" that the sick man was found. He had been slightly injured, and, through carelessness, a fever had set in.

Mrs. Everson questioned her husband regarding him, and finding that he was a man with wife and children, said that she too would like to go in, since there might be something which she could do.

"I will see, my dear. I don't want to be imprudent; these fevers—"

"Oh, Elwood, I haven't the slightest fear; and if I can do anything, let me come!"

"There is Doctor Gregory now, I will ask him."

Having introduced his wife to the physician, he made due inquiries.

"Oh, the man is not in a dangerous condition, but it will be a tedious affair, and he is so terribly impatient and restless. I tell him he keeps the

fever hanging on, besides making his poor wife's task doubly hard!"

"Oh, let me go in then and help her a little; it will cheer her up at any rate," pleaded Gertrude, and the keen-eyed physician looked at her admiringly.

"No danger, not a bit; your cottages are so admirably planned for ventilation and drainage and all that sort of thing, Everson, and that woman in there is one of a hundred."

"I shall go in immediately then and see her," announced Gertrude, preparing to descend from the carriage.

Both gentlemen laughed.

"'An' if she will, she will, you may depend on't!'" quoted the doctor, as he raised his hat and passed on to his own conveyance.

"Well, Mrs. Jones, the doctor says your husband is getting on nicely. This is my wife, who wants to talk a little with you and the children while I see Jones."

"The lady is very kind," said the tired-looking woman, giving Mrs. Everson a chair and then showing the gentleman to her husband's sick room.

Mrs. Everson talked to the poor wife in her cheery sensible way, asking questions to show her interest, and offering advice in such a manner that

it would have been impossible for any one to take offense, and while she talked she had taken a little one from the floor to her lap and was pleasing it in various small ways which she understood well, having been thoroughly initiated by her young nephew, Baby Prince.

The woman appeared very grateful and was growing actually rested under the blessed influence of true sympathy, when suddenly a step was heard on the walk outside and a soft knock at the door.

"It is our minister, ma'am," said Mrs. Jones as she listened, and there was in her face and voice something of the same simple pride which Gertrude had noticed in the children at the mill pond.

An elderly, pleasant looking gentleman entered as Mrs. Jones opened the door.

"Doctor Price, this lady is our young master Everson's wife; the young master has come to see my husband."

"Ah, yes; Mrs. Everson, I am very glad to meet you, your husband is an old friend of mine, or perhaps to put it more properly, I am an old friend of his, having known his father before him."

He took her hand with frank courtesy and seating himself by her spoke pleasantly of Elwood and of the good he had done among the mill people. That she fully agreed with her "minister" in this

matter, Mrs. Jones testified by her eager nods, her flushing and paling cheeks, and her tearful eyes. At last she could contain herself no longer, and when an appropriate pause came she exclaimed, "Indeed, indeed, it's as true as can be, ma'am! The young master has saved my husband from many a foolish deed when he wouldn't have listened to any one else—he's so fiery, Jones is! Excuse me, sir, for speaking, but I wanted the young lady to know."

"Certainly, Mrs. Jones, that is right. Her husband," he added, seeing that it would relieve the poor woman's mind for him to tell it, "her husband, Mrs. Everson, called himself a 'communist,' and he was full of all sorts of wild vague notions about 'master and workman,' rich and poor, etc., when he came here, and as Mrs. Jones truly says, no one had much influence over him for good, except Mr. Everson; he, by his mild yet firm ways, his calm assurance of being in the right, his good precept followed by good example, has at least made a fast friend of Jones, and has done a great deal towards setting his mind right in regard to God's great brotherhood on the earth."

All of which the good woman endorsed eagerly, and when the clergyman went in to see the sick man, Mrs. Jones retold in her own fervent style

all that Mrs. Everson had already heard regarding her husband's peculiar ways of thinking.

"Oh, but he was bitter, ma'am, Jones was, very bitter; he couldn't speak a decent word about any rich gentleman; he said they were all robbers who cared for nobody but themselves. I was almost afraid for the young master, when he came first, after Jones had hired to Superintendent Hopson; he had been talking to the men about their rights, and trying to get them to strike for more wages, and he made some of 'em nearly as crazy as himself. The wives came to me and cried, and said as Jones had come here to spoil all their peace, they said how good and kind the young master was, and how it was a shame to set the men all by the ears so. Well I couldn't help it, but I spoke to Jones, and that only made him more fierce.

"Then, ma'am, that very night the young master came up, and he so innocent and kind, coming in like a friend to see if there was anything he could do for us. I'll never forget the night, ma'am, —never! Jones a-sitting there, looking so hard and angry, with a loaded pistol in his pocket and the young master lifting the little one to his knee and saying what a fine lad he would be! That was only the beginning of all the pleasant things the good gentleman said while he sat here in our

poor little room, and every minute I could see Jones feeling better and better. Who could help it, ma'am, with Mr. Everson asking him 'what did he think of this or that, at the mill,' and getting him to 'look after' something 'as a favor' to the master! Oh, ma'am, I could a cried for joy."

It may be imagined with what interest the young wife listened to these honest praises of her husband, her cheeks glowed, her eyes glistened and her heart swelled with tender pride. Then suddenly from the inner room came the sound of a clear, deep voice. Mrs. Jones ceased speaking and bowed her head reverently. Elwood had set the door slightly ajar and across the silence came the words of a prayer, a prayer which Gertrude had never heard before, but which struck her as being most beautiful and solemn.

"O Blessed Lord, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, we beseech thee look down in pity and compassion upon this thy afflicted servant. Thou writest bitter things against him, and makest him to possess his former iniquities; thy wrath lieth hard upon him, and his soul is full of trouble. But, O merciful God, who hast written thy holy Word for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of thy holy Script-

ures, might have hope; give him a right understanding of himself, and of thy threats and promises; that he may neither cast away his confidence in thee, nor place it anywhere but in thee. Give him strength against all his temptations, and heal all his distempers. Break not the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Shut not up thy tender mercies in displeasure; but make him to hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Deliver him from fear of the enemy, and lift up the light of thy countenance upon him, and give him peace, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

If he could say that prayer, then surely all his old bitter feelings must have been conquered; and yes, she heard distinctly the man's "Amen" following her husband's, in a voice weakened by illness, yet having a determined ring which argued well for his willingness to be rid of all old wicked devices and persuasions. Then followed the usual Prayer for a Sick Person, after which Mr. Everson came out, and having spoken a few more words of kindness to Mrs. Jones, he and his wife drove away.

XVIII.

"ELWOOD, is he a dangerous man?"

"No, I think not now; but he is a troublesome one, and perhaps will always be so. He sometimes helps me to realize what some of us must be to the Great Father, who in all patience and wisdom orders our lives; how we strain at His easy yoke, how we fret and grow impatient at His loving decrees, and imagine that the world is all gone wrong, because forsooth it does not move according to our selfish notions. Aleck Jones is sore at heart and he makes life a weariness to his wife and children, who ought to be happy and comfortable, all because I am the mill owner and he one of my workmen."

"But Elwood, that prayer; surely he must begin to feel differently now if he could at all respond to that."

"Yes, he has lost a good deal of his bitter feeling; he frets and imagines he is a martyr yet, but I do not anticipate any action of his among the

men, he is not ugly, only not thoroughly convinced nor contented. Doctor Price has a wonderful tact with him, in fact with all the mill hands."

"Is not Doctor Price a charming old gentleman? I am so glad that you opened the door to let us hear his prayer."

"I felt that you would appreciate it; I do so want you to find out all the completeness and the beauty of our liturgy."

She smiled, with a little pain at her heart recalling the past troubles at home; then she said, with a sudden thought of his patience and gentleness, "I am learning to love and appreciate it all, Elwood, more than you know, and I appreciate too your forbearance and kindness about it all when I know I must often disappoint you."

Yes, it was dawning upon her mind, how dear to her husband this Church with its ancient liturgy must be. If at that time she and Elwood could have stayed by themselves, just the two, with no outside influence, nor friction of other minds, certainly the Church would have been the consecrating power of all their lives, accepted by her as by him, to order and bless their home; but God does not so allow us to live by ourselves and in the sunshine of our own choosing; it is through the pressure and the jarring and the sharpness of many lives,

each acting upon the other, that He would bring us to victory and peace; it is upon life's battle-field that the character grows symmetrical and calm and purposeful, not in the quiet of the cloister. These two lovers might not sit hand in hand on life's sunny slopes, hearing the sweet harmonies of summer-time and catching the glare of happy sunsets. Nay, the Master had work for them to do, and their daily joy must be won through strongly-fought battles, their sweet life-melody must be struck out from the meeting of mind with mind, in the clear air of generous allowance and Christian sympathy.

They were to remain at H—— over Sunday, and on Saturday Elwood was busy with details of business all the morning. Gertrude told him that she would go and see the sick Mr. Jones and his wife, she had a desire to see more of these people; and carrying some delicacy for the feverish invalid, she set out briskly, enjoying every breath of the keen air, and thinking what a place it must be in mid-summer.

"How Sylvie would revel in it, and her baby Prince—oh, they must certainly come to see it!"

The children saw her as she drew near, and greeted her with such happy little voices that Mrs. Jones was attracted to the window. Her face

brightened at sight of the "young master's lady," and she hastened to bid her enter.

"How is your husband to-day, Mrs. Jones?"

"Oh, ma'am, he is much better; not half as uneasy and fretty since your kind gentleman talked with him the other night. The doctor says if he'll only cease fretting, he'll get on well!"

Gertrude went in, her bright freshness seeming to bring sunshine to all the room.

"Will you give this to your husband from me and say that Mr. Everson's friends are my friends also, and that I want to do all I can for them? Let me take baby for you a little while."

It was a neat, pretty little creature, and appeared well satisfied to be petted by the strange lady. Gertrude loved children, she always said she felt the best part of her nature stirred and warmed into life when she held one of God's little innocent beings in her arms; she was quite at home when talking "baby-talk," and seemed never to exhaust her vocabulary.

In the midst of this Mrs. Jones came back to her, with a request from the sick man; he wanted to see "the young master's lady."

"If you wouldn't mind, ma'am," the wife said apologetically. "He seems to have set his heart

on it, and he's hard to deny, Jones is, when he does set his heart on a thing."

"Why, Mrs. Jones, I shall be very glad to go and speak a little with him, if the doctor would not object, and I scarcely think he would. You must remember, she added, laying her hand with a touch of womanly sympathy upon Mrs. Jones' arm as she noticed her troubled look, "you must remember that I came here with Mr. Everson on purpose to become acquainted with his people, and to be friendly and helpful to them in any way I could."

With her bright smile she encouraged the anxious wife and they entered the sick room together.

"Aleck, this is Mrs. Everson; she is very willing to come in to see you, but you mustn't keep the lady too long, and you know you ought not to talk much."

He seemed to pay no heed whatever to his wife's words, he turned his head to regard Mrs. Everson, and with his bright feverish eyes scanned her from head to foot; then a half-pleased smile flitted over his face.

"She doesn't come here in her silks and jewels," he said as if speaking to himself.

His poor wife looked terribly frightened, but Gertrude only smiled at her and said, "No indeed;

why should I do such a foolish thing as that, Mr. Jones? I came to H—— to learn to know and love my husband's people, and I want to be free and happy among them; why then should I not wear what is comfortable and let the troublesome city dress rest awhile?"

He watched her curiously as she spoke, humoring his fretful notion, and something, either the gentleness of her voice and smile or the tenor of her words, pleased him. The flushed, irritated look gradually softened from his countenance, and he appeared to be studying over some new thought.

"If you will promise to talk quietly or to let me read to you, we shall get on nicely together for a little while, and shall not hinder your wife from her work."

The poor woman, who knew her husband's failing and how scarcely any one but Mr. Everson could restrain him from his indignant outbursts, was glad enough to go and continue her household tasks, and Gertrude set herself cheerfully to the duty in hand. The softly-falling folds of her simple dress made no rustling as she moved about the sick room, and nothing either in her words or manner set her above the human brother who lay suffering and restless there upon the bed. He was half-disconcerted at recognizing this.

"I thought you would be one of those ladies who are too proud to notice a poor workingman, one who would cheat a fellow of his proper wages to buy jewels and trumpery." He looked half-ashamed, yet he had a sort of secret satisfaction, at having said it.

"I am sorry that you have such thoughts of any ladies; I think you will understand us better, some day. Just now I fear it will excite you if we speak of these things, and we are all anxious for you to get well and strong again; I will only tell you now for myself, that if there is anything which I can do to prove to you that I am the friend of working-men and working-women, I hope you will ask me to do it."

While she talked, she had drawn some soft work from her small satchel and was swiftly drawing the light needle through the fleecy white thread. He watched her pretty, delicate hands, and wondered "what nonsense she was at now."

"Maybe I will ask you, ma'am, when the bitter mid-winter is here and it is hard to keep warm and—and—when you ladies are sitting in your handsome warm parlors making such pretty, silly fancy things as that and calling it work!"

A strange little smile flitted over her face, and

she straightened out her work, almost completed, for she had employed many odd minutes on it before, and held it up so that he could see.

"You may tell me if you think it foolish, Mr. Jones, but your baby is such a pretty little creature that I wanted to see how he would look in this. I am going to put some blue ribbons in it, just the color of his eyes, and he shall wear it in here to visit you when you feel strong enough to have him."

She had a girlish pleasure in saying it all and in watching his surprise. A flush and a half-ashamed smile lighted his worn face.

"Now," she went on in her low, soft voice, "you will be talking too much if I stay, and I will only say one thing more; if, when the cold mid-winter comes, as you say, there is anything which you need or which any of the mill people need, I want you to let Mr. Everson know; you can tell better than I or than he can. Remember that we are your friends; God has set us here to be mutual helpers to one another; you all help us by your faithful and successful labor, and we must help you by sympathy and care and watchful interest over your homes and needs. Good-bye, my friend; try to sleep and rest now."

He held her hand, detaining her, while bashful

tears dimmed his eyes and his utterance was choked by a strange emotion.

"Mrs. Everson—forgive me, ma'am! I promised to do better, to put away such bad feelings, but the evil spirit gets hold of me sometimes! If God lets me live, I'll try to be a better man. Would you mind saying for me again the prayer that the minister said the other day? It helps me somehow."

He took a Prayer Book from the little table on the other side of his bed, and handing it to the lady, turned his head on the pillow and closed his eyes.

She was half-frightened, this was something so entirely new to her; yet had she not herself said that she had come there to be her husband's helper among his people? Could she fail or falter, now—dare she, when God so evidently placed the work before her? She turned the pages, they seemed to open readily to the place where the prayer was written.

With scarcely a hesitation, she knelt with her sweet young face lifted and prayed for this repentant man that solemn prayer; then an impulse came to her to add the Lord's Prayer.

"Let us say 'Our Father' now, for we both need our Father's help."

She thought, and rightly, that it would help him to know how she regarded him as a brother. Mrs. Jones, standing at the open door, repeated the prayer with them, while glad tears streamed down her cheeks.

When Gertrude Everson went away, she had won a great victory, though she did not know it. She had conquered the last bitter remnant of dissatisfied feeling in Aleck Jones' heart. He would henceforth be her husband's true and loyal friend, guided in all his actions, not by the mad impulse of a selfish fault-finder against God's ordinances, but by manly, honest wisdom and calm self-respect.

XIX.

GERTRUDE scarcely realized, before the day came, how much that Sunday in the quiet, far-away spot would be to her—just she and Elwood, with no one to cast the shadow of a thought between them; just they two, heart to heart, in the sweet calm of nature, walking through the beauty and the quiet to the little stone church.

In the dark of the previous evening, with her face hidden upon his breast, she had told her husband of her prayer at the sick man's bedside. Elwood had been at Aleck Jones' later on the Saturday evening, to see that every want was supplied; and he had heard there wonderful accounts of his wife's goodness and kindness; but it was her story, so sweet in its modesty, so tender and earnest, that was music to his ears; it was that he waited for, and which he drank in with thirsty love; and, as they walked together to service the next morning, he recalled it all, looking into her dear bright

face. Such a girl, and yet so true and brave a woman!" he thought.

For Gertrude everything was touched with the fair color of her content. The Church service had surely never sounded so grand and symmetrical to her before: its order never seemed so perfect, its anthems and psalter never so beautiful, its collects never so all-comprehensive and solemn. The long Trinity season was drawing to a close, and its grand, echoing anthem of "Holy, Holy, Holy!" seemed to gather glory and strength as it neared its Amen. The Church seemed to stand strong and glorious in the full majesty of her accomplished year, reaching out protecting arms to whosoever would enter in and partake of her wondrous bounty. Gertrude felt a slight disappointment at Doctor Price's sermon, which recounted the blessings of fast and feast at that sunset hour when all the blended beauties of light and shade were gathered in full sight of the army militant. The wondrous round was almost complete. Here now in the calm retrospect of battles lost or won, in the fading radiance of festival joy and the passing shadow of penitential fast, might they not gather strength and wisdom for a new year?

It was a sermon to touch deeply the heart of every true Churchman; but to this woman who

was only just beginning to feel her way along the wonderful road—half dazzled by its long vistas of strange, sweet memory-lights, and awed by its aisles of consecrated shade—to her it was not wholly satisfying; her heart was full of a sweet earthly love, and she would fain have traced it back to the Great Giver in a sermon which told wholly of heavenly love, and of that incarnate God who had so vested His divine nature with our poor humanity, that we may now say of every sentiment and emotion which thrills us "Jesus knows!"

That morning her heart was too weighted with its own joy to be lifted to any generous height, too heavy indeed with its own measure of sweet happiness to rise into that higher atmosphere where stands Christ's Church, His household warm and bright with that larger love which looks away from self toward "these also" who must be brought into that blessed family. She felt the sermon cold and formal. "Why did they not preach more of God's love, and less of the Church?" Occasionally a sentence like the following would almost annoy her: "To be a devout and consistent Churchman brings a man through aisles fragrant with holy associations, and companied by a long procession of the good." Where then were her dear ones—they who had passed

from this earth? Were they shut out from that "long procession of the good"? Yet were they not good?—her mother, that dear mother, of whom Sylvie had so often told her; her father, whose memory was kept fresh and beautiful to them by the words of those who had known and loved him, who had shared his bounty and been helped by his counsel. She had a feeling of being outside of all that which the preacher described as so altogether good and desirable. It troubled her. There was no sweet sentiment here of which she could speak to her husband, and say "Was not that true?"

She wondered if he were enjoying it all,—if his heart were responding to it eagerly,—while she sat apart, unsympathetic and uncomprehending.

She wished there had been no sermon—she had enjoyed the service so well! It had taken on the bright tint of her happiness; and, through prayer and anthem, her heart had gone up to the Good Giver of life's joy; but here was something beyond that—broader, deeper, that required more of her.

She sighed and was glad when Doctor Price finished; she glanced stealthily up into her husband's face; it was warm with tender emotion, his eyes seemed gazing far back, reflecting the

light from a strange sweet past; she opened her Hymnal to hide the tears of disappointment which would come.

The recessional hymn was "The Church's one foundation." She read the words over mechanically.

"The Church, the Church!" somewhat impatiently her thoughts tried to compass the full meaning of the lines as they followed each other, but she seemed only to grow more and more bewildered.

As they passed out, Mr. Everson found many people waiting to shake hands with him. Poor Gertrude, puzzled and wearied with her mind's efforts, was glad to get out into the clear sunlight.

She was like a gentle bird to whom a glorious forest is suddenly opened, its myriad avenues of greenery, its winding tracery of light and shadow, its wealth of arching boughs all seem so great, so large, she wants only her own dear tree, her one sweet nest and her mate.

So it was with Gertrude, who could not yet look out from her own absorbing love, her one little nest of joy and rest, to catch any realizing view of Christ's broad household, that ancient and glorious body which He had con-

secrated with His own life blood; she could not see them "from every nation" gathering, a grand army pressing on under one banner, toward one hope, a loving family whose kinship with saints and martyrs of long ago keeps them "one o'er all the earth," strong in faith, and true to their Living Head; she could only as yet see her one sweet gift, for which her heart was very grateful—her love, for whose dear sake she was willing to worship as he pleased.

She talked with one and another of Elwood's people, in her kind bright way expressing interest in their homes and families, and telling them how she was enjoying her visit among them, then smiling into her husband's face, she walked on by his side, forgetting everything except her joy in his love, her trust in him whose strong, rich life had enfolded hers.

Elwood did not remark anything about the sermon. She in her simple honesty praised the music, the service, the pretty church building, and her husband was fain to be content.

"Patience," he said to himself, as he mused upon it, "patience, it will come; I feel sure it will come in good time."

Yes, "all things come round to him who will but wait," though they may perchance come oft-

times through suffering and by thorny ways; it matters not, since it is our Father's loving hand which marks out all for us.

"Elwood," she said, "I am very glad that we came here! I like the place; it has been so peaceful and pleasant. It will always make me glad to know that you have such a charming bit of country life and scenery connected with your city business, a spot where you can turn occasionally for a larger breath."

He was glad that she liked it so well; he would spare as many days yet as he possibly could, that they might enjoy it together, and then he wondered if he might not have a little home there to which he and Gertrude could come each summer. He had never imagined that she would care for anything so quiet and simple, this bright young creature who had been so full of life and song and gayety; he had been prepared to abandon his own quiet, sober routine somewhat in response to her desires, to give up certain calm, bachelor ways, and to enter with his wife into the sunshine and the whirl of society life. He was greatly pleased that she should so appreciate the rugged beauty of this country about his mills, and during the days that remained to them there, he devoted himself wholly to her, making each day golden to

her with the wealth of his affection and the brightness of his presence.

Oh, the fragrance and the beauty of that little time. How she recalled it afterward with a sickening sense of pain!

What is such love given us for? Is it not that we may cement with it the whole fabric of our daily existence, filling each crevice and corner so that no outside wind may chill us, no rude breath reach us—that we may be secure, unharmed, with such strong support through and about our whole life?

Ah, if Gertrude had but made such sweet use of God's great gift, if she had but been wiser! Who of us, however, can cast a stone of reproach at her? Who of us has so clearly seen God's intention for us through His precious gifts that our life has not failed somewhat of its grace and worth? For all of us, alas, "knowledge through suffering entereth."

Gertrude at least had the radiance of those days set star-like in her memory, to which she could look for comfort if any cloud came darkening her sky in future days.

For Elwood Everson, he gave himself up to the intoxicating sweetness with a sort of trembling foreboding that it would not last, that he would

yet find a bitterness mingling with his full cup of bliss. And if so? Well, he would simply do his best, rounding his life to compass each duty as much as in him lay, leaving the rest to the Master; and for these present days he stood with the woman he loved in the rare sweet sunshine and was satisfied.

XX.

AND now the radiant days were ended and life was to begin in very earnest. To Sylvie the younger sister on her return confided her resolution to make "a busy winter."

"Oh, I shall try to do and to learn so much of everything! I want to be a good wife to Elwood—he is so kind! And Mother Everson will teach me a great deal, I know; she is a dear, gentle woman; I do hope we may have a real cheerful winter together, and that the girls will not insist upon chalking the line for me to walk by!"

She laughed merrily, half hiding her blushing face behind the castle she was building of Prince's blocks, yet watching with keen interest her sister's face. She detected instantly the slight shadow which crossed it at her last words.

"Sylvie dear, I will try to be—what was it you said, 'wise as serpents'? It doesn't sound pretty for a young wife, but if you say it is the thing, I will try hard for it."

"I wish you would, dear; I do not think it is a very easy thing to go as you have, from a home where there were just a brother and a sister who perhaps made too much of you, into one where there are four sisters. I sometimes fear that perhaps I myself have not been wise, that I have not helped to prepare you for your new life and duties as I should have done."

"Oh Sylvie!" exclaimed her sister reproachfully.

"It is true, dear; I know that in your position a great deal of care and forbearance is needed. We all have peculiarities and faults, we have to overlook a great deal, and to be patient with one another. Stewart and I love you so well that perhaps we do not see your failings as others would, and I fear that through our affection you are ill-prepared to encounter other natures less lenient."

"Do not censure yourself nor be anxious, Sylvie dear; I promise you I shall look to my ways, and try to bear with other people as I shall expect them to bear with me. You and Stewart indeed! Why you have made my life so good between you that it must needs overflow a little and show somewhat gracious to others. Never fear, my sister!"

Sylvie was fain to be content and to hope for the best, but she detected in her sister's manner and

look, a certain something which had never been there before and which made her anxious. It was indefinable, subtle. It was not dignity nor hauteur, neither injured pride nor a determination to walk in her own way, it was perhaps a mingling of all these; it was an armor, which this young wife had cast over herself as a sort of preparation for the conflict which she felt would come; it was a lace-like armor like that of old; but, like that too, it was very strong and serviceable; Gertrude's old gayety shone through it brightly, and no ordinary friend could have discerned it upon her. Sylvie was not an ordinary friend.

Rica was very loving with her old schoolmate, and made great efforts to get back to the old affectionate intimacy and freedom of intercourse. Gertrude was truly fond of this sister of Elwood's, and she very willingly joined in her efforts to recover the long familiar footing, but it was not altogether easy.

Advent season had brought its tender hush to the Church militant. Hearts glad with expectancy were yet solemn with thoughts of preparation, and the waiting time was a time of fasting and prayer. Gertrude told herself that she did not approve of it all.

"It is not natural, it cannot be proper, to sit in sackcloth and ashes waiting for the best gift that

ever came to man," she said. "I am sure it cannot be pleasing to the Gracious Giver."

She wondered why the Church kept the season in such solemn way; once she would have gone to Rica with ready questioning and a willingness to know, but now a sort of restraint held her, and she had no questions for any one, not even for her husband, who hoped that she might care to know, yet who would not vex her with explanations unsought.

She, walking per force in the shadow of the season, said to herself, "Why does he not tell me?" not knowing how tenderly his heart yearned over her, how he longed that she should know all that he held sacred and sweet, yet would not tell her, lest he should seem to urge her more than was right.

The quiet of the household ways, the absence of all gayety and of all amusement oppressed her, she was so accustomed to filling the weeks previous to Christmas with good-cheer, with happy mirth, to hearing, on all sides, busy, bright sounds of preparation for the coming feast, unmixed with any solemn warning or searching prayer for fitness. Her days now were filled with thoughts and plans for her many gifts to the dear ones, that was chiefly what Christmas meant to her, and Advent

was (as she saw it) only a joyous occasion of getting ready her presents and her surprises. If she had any spare time, her natural inclination was to spend it in scenes of special brightness and gayety. It seemed right to be glad and to make merry, and the double significance of Advent had not yet been made clear to her mind; thus it was that she found through the shadows of that Advent time the first thorn in her sweet flower of love. The daily service, attended by all the females of the household, without question or break, seemed in its monotony to fret her. She had gone with Elwood to the evening service several times, and once, much to the surprise and indignation of his sisters, he stayed at home with her when she had a headache.

At an unfortunate moment at this season, Sylvie had mentioned the opera to her sister.

"Get Elwood to take you and Rica," she had said in her unconscious kindness, "you are both so fond of good music, and this is a rare treat, I assure you."

Nevertheless, she would have remained dumb forever on the subject of music and operas had she but known, this faithful Sylvie, to what endless trouble and pain she was by her simple suggestion leading her young motherless sister.

"So I will!" cried Gertrude. "I am thirsting for some real good music; I'll ask Elwood, this very night."

Of Rica she had her doubts, but she would at least ask her. She went to her and found her playing the piano.

"What solemn, melancholy music you do play nowadays, Rica!"

"Yes, it is more appropriate to the season, you know, and I always had a fancy for these weird, wailing things."

"Dear me, I haven't!" exclaimed her sister-in-law, bursting out with a gay trill of song such as she had been used to utter in the past girlhood days.

Rica smiled at her, half-wondering yet glad too at the old familiar merriment.

"I didn't mean to interrupt you, Rica, I only came to ask if you would not like to go to the opera to-night. It is 'Rienzi,' you know, and Sylvie says it is very fine. I am going to ask Wood to take us, if you will go."

Poor Rica; she could not bear to pain this dear friend again, and almost felt she could say yes and find it no wrong if she had only herself to consult, but she was the youngest of the family, and she knew very well that there would be no forgiveness

for her if she should do this thing for the sake of Elwood's wife.

"Dear, you know it is Advent, and we never go to any place of amusement during the season, otherwise I should love to go with you. However, there will be the 'Messiah' in Christmas week, and as you love oratorio music we can go there together." She looked longingly into Gertrude's face, out of which the sunshine was passing.

"Very well, Rica, you know best for yourself, of course."

She went slowly from the room, not angrily but sadly; she had always known that Rica loved the Church, and had often laughed at her for her devotion, but now it seemed to touch her more deeply, to set itself as a sort of barrier between them. She cheered herself with the thought that she and Elwood might at all events have a pleasant evening together.

"We shall have many such through the winter," she said, as she busied herself over her embroidery, "and Rica shall hear the 'Messiah' with us, for she is never severe and sanctimonious like the others!"

She dressed herself and went down the avenue to meet her husband on his way home. She had done this occasionally, and the sober man of busi-

ness was very proud and glad of that sweet pretty face which was raised so gaily to meet his own.

Gertrude appeared particularly attractive on this afternoon; her walk in the cold air and the thought of what she was to ask Elwood sent a bright color to her cheeks and her eyes sparkled.

"Why, my love, you look as fresh as a June rose here in this December blast!"

She laughed gaily, and taking his arm they walked on together, while many a passer-by looked a second time at the couple, he, tall manly and handsome, she so girlish and fair. They had not gone a block before Gertrude began on the subject which engrossed her thoughts.

"Oh, Elwood, I want to go to the opera, it is so long since we have been, and I am thirsting for some good music! Sylvie was at the matinée of 'Rienzi,' and she says it is very fine. Could we not go to-night, or, I don't know about tickets, perhaps to-morrow night would be better?"

At least she had given him time to recover from his first start of dismay, yet he had no ready answer for her as she turned her eager face to him with a light of perfect assurance upon it which almost irritated him. Had she not learned through all the services what this season was to a devout Churchman? Did she care so little for these

things that they failed to impress her at all? These thoughts flashed hotly through his mind and were gone; his old regretful tenderness of manner returned, and his eyes were sad as they looked down into hers while he made reply. She knew then before he spoke what his answer would be.

"My dear wife, you must be patient with me until you learn fully about our Church Year. Advent is a solemn fast season with us; and our custom is to refrain from the amusements and pleasures of ordinary times. You cannot know how it grieves me to say no to—or, rather, to postpone for a time—your request. I should enjoy the opera greatly; and I hope, when Advent is over, that we may go together many times. We will try to have a real pleasant winter, darling—our first winter!—but it shall be bright as summer, if love can make it so!"

Her face was a study with its varied expressions, first a keen disappointment, then almost tears as she noted how dear this Churchly round was to him, above all other loves evidently—and again a look of tender relenting as he spoke of the winter, warmed and brightened by his love for her. How should she answer him? Generously? Striving to find her wishes parallel with his,—knowing how well he loved her? Ah, if she had but said to

him, "Tell me of Advent and all its deep solemn signification, that I may learn to love and appreciate it as you do," but she did not; and how could he urge upon her a teaching for which she did not ask?

"Very well, dear, we will wait, then; I dare say the play will be given again after Christmas."

XXI.

GERTRUDE went to the matinée with Sylvie, and told of it at home somewhat triumphantly, it must be confessed, and her husband listening, answered her pleasantly, betraying an interest which shocked his sisters and called forth one of Jessie's sarcastic remarks. It was only one of the many small clouds which were gathering in the fair sky—little things in themselves, yet tending all towards that bitterness of feeling which is so destructive to family happiness and peace. There fell a sweet calm of sunshine and good-will at Christmas, and the master of the Everson household thanked God and took courage.

Mrs. Everson the elder sent an early and urgent invitation for Mr. and Mrs. Yates, as well as the young "Prince," to spend Christmas Day with her, and the invitation had been accepted. They had all attended service together, and this in itself was a great peace-offering, setting them all upon a

pleasant level for the time being, and affording a subject for general and amicable conversation. Even Jessie, who was happy in the presence of her affianced, Mr. Allan Brewster, seemed to have forgotten her sarcastic speeches and unkind innuendoes. Grace received with becoming smiles and blushes much banter from some of the party who had noticed how the young assistant of St. Ann's had hastened to walk home with her.

"Did you not ask Mr. Sherwood to come in and dine with us, my child?" asked Mrs. Everson.

"Why no, mother; he is so very enthusiastic over the Christmas trees for the schools that I was afraid he would monopolize the conversation," replied Grace, laughing good-humoredly.

"That is why he attached himself to our Grace, he has discovered what a tireless worker she is, on all such occasions."

"You see, Mr. Sherwood has taken upon himself the whole responsibility of the Christmas festivals for the schools. Doctor Dorman is not able to undertake anything of that sort."

"But oh, how solemn and beautiful Doctor Dorman makes any part of the service which he takes, and what a sermon he gave us!" exclaimed Gertrude.

"Trude appreciates our dear old rector, she

has good taste," said Rica, who was always well-pleased at any praise for the revered clergyman who had baptized and proposed her for confirmation.

With gay and cheerful conversation, with all good-will and kindness of feeling the day was passed.

To those who could look back through the Church's long vista of years and see with eyes of faith the world's new-born Redeemer and feel the thrill of that sacred Infant smile, the day held a gladness and a meaning whose depth no others could fathom. This was the beginning of that wondrous life which the Church followed through its years of sacrifice and pain and work, marking each scene with tender coloring of strange, sad reality. Once again this holy round was begun, once more the Church knelt at the manger-cradle of its divine Founder, laying its weight of trouble and need upon those infant hands, and counting one year more of warfare one year's space nearer to the triumph when the kingdoms of the world shall have become the kingdom of its Lord and Saviour.

Ah, what a day then was this Christmas! What mere worldling, what stern moralist or sage philosopher could fathom half of the great worth and glory of this Church feast?

There came a strange ending to this bright and joyous Christmas at the Everson home, one as sad as unexpected.

It was late, the last guest had departed with words of merry cheer, the lights were dim, the younger women were lingering to chat pleasantly over all the day's events, and Elwood stood at the window which he had gone to close, looking out upon the still, starry night; his thoughts had gone far back to that first Christmas night, when the angels sang for joy at the Redeemer's birth and a strange glory shone out over Bethlehem's plains. Suddenly he started in surprise. A carriage was driven swiftly to the door and a figure stepped out, which looked strangely familiar to him. It was—yes, it certainly was Doctor Dorman.

He did not wait for the bell to ring, but went quickly to the door.

"Doctor Dorman! Is it you, sir?"

"It is I, Everson," he answered, and his voice trembled with emotion.

"Can I see you alone for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, sir; walk right in here."

He took the clergyman to a small reception room and drew an easy chair to the fire, then noticing how worn and agitated he looked he said,

"Excuse me for one moment, doctor," and went to get him a glass of wine.

"Thank you, Everson, thank you! I am somewhat unnerved by that which I have come to tell you. It is so sudden, so unexpected! De Lancey, you know—"

He spoke in broken, nervous half-sentences, as if his courage failed him to tell the whole.

Elwood sat down close to him, and his strong fresh manhood seemed to nerve the aged clergyman. He looked full into the elder man's face with a questioning gaze.

"Doctor Dorman, you may trust me. Do not hesitate if there is anything in which I can be of help to you."

"Thank you, Everson; I know I can rely upon you, that is why I have come directly to you, and moreover — De Lancey is — was — your friend."

"It is about De Lancey then? Yes, he is my friend; indeed, we are on very intimate and friendly terms with all his family."

"And yet you had no suspicion of this thing?"

"I had no least suspicion of anything wrong, sir. I have thought De Lancey rather more engrossed in business of late, possibly even a trifle harassed, but there has been nothing seri-

ous, I feel sure, or he would have confided it to me; we are old college mates, you know."

"Yes, yes, I know; but poor De Lancey has confided in nobody this time, Everson. He has gone, and all the money is gone with him—the money of the firm and our Church funds! There was a discovery of some forgery, and then De Lancey was missing."

"No, no!" reiterated Elwood, rising to his feet in sudden dismay. "Oh no, it cannot be! De Lancey—Grif De Lancey?"

"Alas, yes, my son!" replied the old clergyman. "De Lancey our Church treasurer, the man whom we all have loved and trusted, in the hour of strong temptation he has fallen. May the gracious God yet raise him up!"

"But, doctor, I cannot understand! If Grif were in trouble, in need, why did he not come to me and say so?—we were like brothers together—or to his own brother? Poor Malcolm, poor young fellow! Where is he? Does he know?"

The strong man paced the floor, in sincere brotherly grief.

"Malcolm was away on business, they have sent for him. They came to me this evening, a few hours ago, Kent and the other partner; they had been to De Lancey's house, and of course had not

found him. His poor young wife! I went to her as soon as I had told them all I could, which was very little; she is a frail little woman; I do not think she can bear up under a long pressure of trouble."

"And she was so proud, so fond of Grif! Poor thing, I will go to see her immediately. There is nothing else to be done, doctor?"

"I fear not. If you could go to her, Everson, I should be glad. Malcolm cannot get back before to-morrow at the earliest. I cannot tell just how much Mrs. De Lancey suspects. Of course they did not tell her, but his absence, and at such a season, must seem strange to her at least."

"We will go immediately, doctor. I will see my wife and be ready in a few minutes."

Elwood went to his room, and on the way encountered Rica.

"We are wondering if anything is wrong, Wood. Mother wanted me to wait and ask you."

"It is some one in trouble, and Doctor Dorman wanted my assistance. I may possibly be away all night, so do not be anxious. In any case, I shall be in to breakfast; I am going to see Gertrude, and then hurry away with the doctor. Good-night, my sister."

She thought there was an unusual tenderness

in his words and his kiss, but she suspected nothing, while he was saying to himself, as he hastened on, "Poor Rica! She and Malcolm will find the shadows early!"

He told his wife all that he had heard, only suggesting that for the present they should say nothing to the others.

"Let this day at least pass without the cloud," he said, and with a caressing "Good-night," he left her.

Gertrude too felt sorry for Rica; she had guessed how much Rica and young Malcolm De Lancey were to each other, and what unspoken hopes for the future they cherished. Would all these be rudely blasted now? Poor Rica!

Then came the girl's soft voice at the door, and the two sat together, speaking of Elwood's ready kindness, praising, as women are apt to praise, this man whom they loved, and the Christmas Day passed quietly away, the still, starry skies looked down upon the old world—the world which waited for its Judge as once it had waited for its Redeemer.

XXII.

ELWOOD was in at breakfast time, and his face told plainly that he had sad news for the family.

"But wait," he said, "I will tell you by and by. Let us have breakfast first," and he made an effort to be cheerful during the meal.

After prayers he took his mother aside and told her all.

"Tell the girls, mother, please. I have asked Gertrude to go to Mrs. De Lancey soon. Some womanly comfort and presence will be more to her than anything which Doctor Dorman or I could say. Malcolm has telegraphed he will get in this evening."

Thus by the fall of one member, many members suffered; and Christ, through His Church, was wounded afresh!

Gertrude recalled to mind how very particularly devout in his every action during service had been this Church treasurer; she knew how much he had

been esteemed among the members of the vestry, what charges had been committed to his keeping; she said sarcastically, "Mr. De Lancey's devout Churchly ways had not much sincerity in them after all! He has fallen as wofully as any Methodist, for all his vaunted ecclesiastical supports!"

The sorrowing women looked up at her in amazement, and Jessie's face flushed with a fierce indignation; Gertrude would hardly have made so bitter a remark except for the awkward silence which fell upon the little group as Mrs. Everson finished her story from real life. No one seemed able to speak, and Rica's white face, with its sudden pain, made Gertrude's heart ache. Her thoughts rose up in indignant remonstrance against this man who from the midst of his many privileges and from his high position and proud profession, had so fallen, and brought such pain and trouble to others. She spoke out, scarcely realizing how bitter her words were, she was thinking only of the poor heart-broken young wife, and of the brother who was striving to win a place and a name among men, that he might ask for Rica Everson's love.

"It is hardly worth while to give the Church the benefit of your anger," said Mrs. Richards, in her quiet, scornful way. "That venerable body will

scarcely feel the blight of your tremendous scoffing."

"Children! My dear children!" cried the distressed mother. "Is it a time for such unkind speeches? Is not life full enough of sadness, that you must say such things to each other?"

"It was too good an opportunity for Gertrude to let pass," remarked Jessie with a curling lip.

"Poor Mr. De Lancey, how sorely he must have been tempted. You know, my dear Gertrude, a man's sin is not the worse because he is a Churchman," said Mrs. Everson with gentle reproval.

"Pardon me, mother, if I spoke too harshly, but one naturally expects more perfect uprightness from a man who carries a semblance of piety and devotion in his every action."

"I suppose, then, you would in any case regard a Churchman as more worthy of censure than a Presbyterian or a Baptist simply because he kneels to pray, stands to sing, and bows reverently at certain holy things?" remarked Grace, who was always more ready to argue with her sister-in-law than were the others.

"If he does those things with a conscious pride and a Pharisaical look of being holier than his neighbors,—yes, I do consider that he is worthy of far greater censure. If your Church has, as you

say, such strong and ancient supports for a man's religion, if she surrounds him with such wondrous helps and lights and holy examples, then certainly more should be required of him than of those benighted ones who sit outside of all those influences."

"I think we are all somewhat too excited by this sad and sudden news to be able to argue or discuss such questions in a proper way. Let us rather see what we can do to help those who mourn."

It was Rica who spoke, and she seemed in a moment to have crossed from girlhood into the calm patience of true womanhood. She rose up, with her white face full of a pure trust.

"Trudie, would you mind my going with you to Mrs. De Lancey?"

"Mind it, Rica? No, indeed! I shall be only too glad if you will come. Elwood wanted me to go, and I know he would be pleased that we should both go. We have been there so often, in joyous days, it is only right that we should go now when such a terrible sorrow has fallen over the happy little household."

They met the aged rector just leaving the house; he looked utterly broken down, and it made their young hearts ache to see his bowed head, with its

white locks, and the trembling hand which reached to grasp their own.

"God bless you, my children. Go and speak comfortably to the wife whom His Hand has so sorely chastened."

"He will never recover from this blow," said Rica, prophetically, as they stood watching his feeble steps. "The disgrace to the Church will touch him so deeply, and he is not young enough to face boldly the sneers of a fault-finding world." It was quite true. The faithful clergyman, who had brought many of them on the Christian way from the baptismal font to the bishop's hands for confirmation, and thence to the chancel for the Church's blessing in holy matrimony, was now nearing the time when he must give up his stewardship. It was sad to know that the account must close with a shadow upon the final page, albeit through no fault or neglect on his part. He preached but one more sermon after this fall of the treasurer of the Church, and that was a sermon which none who heard it ever could forget—so gentle, so pleading, so searching, so full of the quickening Spirit that it brought tears to every eye and touched deeply many a heart.

His people had scarcely realized till then how much he was to them, this man of God who had

dwelt in their midst so long, ministering to them with such zeal, such pure love, such unselfishness and careful wisdom! He had never been found "too old" for his position, neither were his words nor his counsels too "old-fashioned" for his hearers. Though there were many young people in the parish of St. Ann's, no voice had ever been raised to pronounce judgment against the aged rector, as a man too much "behind the times" or "not up to the standard of the day."

He had taken a young assistant fresh from one of the foremost institutions of the time, and supposed to be well-grounded in all the intricacies of modern questions, yet there was scarcely one among his congregation who did not infinitely prefer the rector himself in almost any capacity and at any time. Possibly Grace Everson might be counted an exception, but Grace was in that state of bewilderment in which the mind grows somewhat confused over the difference between clergyman and friend. To do him justice, Mr. Sherwood was himself sadly grieved at his companion's inability to continue in active charge of St. Ann's. His generous words of approval were not lacking when the people proposed a season of rest and recreation for Doctor Dorman, together

with a continuation of the nominal rectorship as long as he lived.

Perhaps no one regretted the retirement of the old clergyman and the active charge of the young assistant more than Gertrude Everson. She had conceived almost a dislike for Mr. Sherwood which she could neither account for nor rid herself of. There was an assurance, an assumption of wisdom in his manner which greatly annoyed her, it so strongly contrasted with the elder clergyman's modesty and simple quiet demeanor.

"I don't see how you can endure him, Rica; he is like a puppet, with his mincing ways and his rainbow colors!"

"Oh, Trude, you are very harsh."

"No, dear, I am not. Tell me, why should he wear all those colors about his shoulders, every few Sundays a different one, when good old Doctor Dorman wears only black and white?"

"Well, Doctor Dorman is rather more quiet and old-fashioned in his ways, and does not care for the changes of color appropriate to the Church seasons, but you see, Trudie, he allows it in the chancel, and so there can be no impropriety in Mr. Sherwood wearing what he prefers."

"If he had the modesty of feeling proper to a young man assisting an older one, he would find a

great impropriety in it, I think, and you know, Rica, that the chancel adornments are all made in accordance with Mr. Sherwood's plans!"

"But the doctor does not object to any of them."

"No, the doctor is too peaceful and likes harmony too well to object to anything any more than I object or than Elwood does when your little man comes bowing up, and says, 'Well, next Sunday will be the Presbyterian Sunday, I suppose?' It would be taking too much notice of him to object. I declare, Rica, if Doctor Dorman goes away and Mr. Sherwood preaches and has full charge, I shall feel like making every Sunday a 'Presbyterian' one."

"Oh no, Trude; be more generous than that, and don't regard the man who ministers; think only of the beauty of the grand old liturgy which no man can spoil!"

But Gertrude Everson had not yet found the completeness of that liturgy. She could not hear, through the voice of the present man, be he never so weak and faulty, the tones of apostles and Church fathers, nor the utterance of saint and martyr; the ancient liturgy had as yet for her but a dim and incomplete music.

Rica and the gentle mother were the only ones

who kept any patience and forbearance for Gertrude, who appeared so obstinate in refusing to love and abide in wholly the Church of her husband and his family. Between Gertrude and the other sisters the breach seemed daily widening. Harsh words, unkind insinuations, sneers even, tended only to confirm each one in her own way, and to leave no room for any generous thought or feeling. This state of affairs was especially noticeable after the fall of Mr. De Lancey, the Church treasurer, and the consequent trouble in St. Ann's parish.

Gertrude was not an ungenerous woman. She had large sympathy and pity for Mrs. De Lancey, but she saw in the fall of the husband only the result of what she called "a formal show of piety," "an appearance of devotion and warmth, with no reality back of it at all.

"If a man would bow and kneel more in the privacy of his own room, and less in the sight of the people," she pronounced, "he might perchance be able to stand upright in the hour of temptation."

With such bitter utterances as these, Gertrude vexed her sisters-in-law, and turned their hearts against her, in those days of trial when the shadow of a brother's sin lay heavy upon the spirits of all the members of St. Ann's parish.

XXIII.

ELWOOD had so much upon his mind and so much to occupy him more than usual, in those days, that he did not notice the constantly-widening breach between his wife and his sisters. Mr. De Lancey had made a gap in the affairs of the parish which each one rose up in all pride and honor to endeavor to fill. Night after night Elwood Everson sat with the old rector and the vestrymen, striving to straighten out that which his friend had left so tangled and crooked. Gertrude, missing her husband, spent those evenings at Sylvie's. Sylvie and Stewart were quick to discern that their petted sister was not altogether happy, and it grieved them much.

"It is nothing, absolutely nothing but the Church!" she declared once, when they had questioned her. "Upon every other point, we are harmonious and united, but because I cannot give an immediate and complete acceptance of all their Church doctrines and theories, they denounce me

as a heretic, and think that I am 'ruining Elwood's life'!"

She sighed, and looked so unhappy, so altogether different from the old merry girl Gertrude, that Stewart grew indignant.

"I declare, Sylvie, I am devoutly thankful that I did not marry a woman with four sisters! I fear that sisters-in-law, as described by Trudie, would sour the sweetness of my disposition."

"I don't know, Stewart. You are so kind, and never ready to take offense. I wish I were more like you. Then I dare say we should get on better."

"I do dislike bigots," said Stewart, and then he paused, for he was a wise man, and knew that he would not make Gertrude's position any easier or pleasanter by speaking against her new relatives.

Sylvie's face wore a look of deep pain and anxiety.

"I thought it was the best thing that could have been," she said reflectively. "I really felt glad and grateful that you were not to go to a new home, all by yourselves, you and Elwood; it seemed so good that you were to be a part of the family where you had been intimate and friendly for so long; I did not dream of any trouble!"

"And you must not now, dear! I will not live in constant trouble with any one; I will go away, when I can't bear it any longer."

Gertrude said it half-laughingly, yet the look of pain beneath her smile did not escape the loving eyes which were watching her.

"Try to be wise and generous, Trudie. Make allowances for people, and for the training and habits of half a lifetime."

"Yes, Sylvie, I will," and she honestly meant it, yet the seeds of bitterness and misunderstanding once sown are difficult to uproot—swift of growth, and plentiful of fruitage.

For a time the trouble seemed to be held in abeyance by the sympathy and tenderness between Gertrude and Rica, and by their mutual sorrow and care for young Mrs. De Lancey.

Malcolm, the young brother of the forger, had come home, and was doing all in his power to comfort his sister-in-law, as well as to unravel the tangled threads which his brother had left in his disgraceful flight.

Sometimes Rica met Malcolm in those sad days of unexpected coming and going, and always the look of utter hopelessness in his eyes made her heart ache. She knew well what it meant. He had scarcely dared to show her his love by look or

action before that shadow had come to darken his family name ; he was waiting on, until he could offer her a home which he considered in some way worthy of her. Now there could never be any more patient labor and fond waiting, for hope had been killed outright by that one cruel blow from a brother's hand. No, he would not speak now, and yet how she longed to comfort him—to show him her unchanged heart !

Sorrow to her, as love to Gertrude, had opened the door into womanhood, and Rica and her old school friend were nevermore to be merry, light-hearted girls again, chatting of life's future with gay words and bright prophecies. They drew nearer each other in those hours of sorrow, and Gertrude's sympathy was very pleasant to her sister. They used to sit sometimes together, sometimes alone, with Mrs. De Lancey. She was utterly broken down. She had been a fair, frail creature, clinging wholly upon the strong arm of her husband, and now that had been so rudely, so suddenly withdrawn, that she felt herself sinking,—drooping. No sunshine of life could ever revive her, no sweet air of heaven cause her to lift up her head.

Three little children played about her, and looked wonderingly into mamma's sad, white face,

which refused to smile upon them, as it had been wont. Even these had no power to draw her from her silent despair! It was sad to see them, as they brought their toys and dolls to "mamma's room," playing in a subdued way, and kissing the mother's face with pretty, coaxing caresses. They became fond of young Mrs. Everson in those days. She loved children, and her heart was sad for these little ones, upon whose early sunshine the shadow of another's sin had fallen.

She spent many an hour with them, telling stories, dressing dolls, and listening to their soft prattle.

"Is my papa dead?" asked the eldest suddenly one evening as bed-time drew near. "'Cause if he's dead I needn't say 'God bless papa' any more, and I don't want to, either."

"I will tell you, dear Griffie; you must ask God to bless your papa, and send him home to you again. God knows all about papa. We do not think he is dead; but he may be lost or in trouble, and so we must all ask God to take care of him."

The little fellow's mind was evidently struggling with the problem.

"He isn't a good papa, else he wouldn't go 'way and get lost, and make mamma cry and be sick."

Gertrude was casting about in her mind how to make answer to the child, when his uncle, Mr. Malcolm De Lancey, entered the room with a letter in his hand, and a strange, agitated look upon his face.

"It has come at last," he said to Gertrude, handing her the unopened letter with its foreign postmark and his brother's unmistakable handwriting.

The letter was addressed to Mrs. De Lancey.

"Oh, Malcolm, take it to her immediately. It is news, at all events ; however sad, it is certainty, and it will be a relief to her."

The young man's strong face was drawn with a convulsive emotion.

"Gertrude, dear friend, I cannot. Do you carry it to her, please; a woman's gentleness will be more comforting to her than a man's blunt way."

She was starting to leave the room, when little Grif's great eager eyes constrained her to pause.

"Is that a letter from my papa ?" he asked before she could speak to him.

"We think so, dear; it looks like papa's writing. I am going to take it to mamma, and if there is any news for papa's little son, you shall hear it in the morning, but never tease your mamma about it. Now go to bed, and don't forget your little prayer."

Gertrude had told her husband she would be there that evening, and he was to stop for her on his way home. She went away with the strange letter which perhaps would reveal so much.

She was surprised to find Rica with Mrs. De Lancey. The girl had come in quietly, and hearing Gertrude with the children, had gone directly to the lonely mother. It was with a feeling of relief that her sister-in-law placed the letter in Rica's hands and said briefly, "Malcolm brought it. Give it to her."

She only stayed to hear a wailing cry of anguish and the rustle of the envelope in the wife's trembling fingers, then she went back to Malcolm, who was pacing to and fro with bowed head and tightly-clasped hands.

"Malcolm, Rica was there, and I gave it to her; I was glad she should be the one; it is more fitting that she should share your deepest sorrow, that she should stand closer to you all at this time."

He turned upon her almost fiercely in his great pain.

"And why, pray, is it fitting that Miss Everson should share our shame? Has she in her purity anything to do with our blighted lives; rather she should stand afar off from us, and turn her face away from us in our disgrace." His voice broke

at the last, and he turned to the window, peering out into the darkening night, to conceal his emotion.

Gertrude's heart was very heavy, as she saw his great sorrow. She went to him, laying her hand with gentle touch of sympathy, upon his arm.

"My dear friend, forgive me! I am Rica's sister, I have been her close companion for years, I know her heart—how tender, how loyal, how true it is! If I had committed a sin, if I were shamed in the eyes of the world, I would still go and lay my head upon Rica's breast, and feel sure of her love. Oh, Malcolm, it is in times of sorrow and trouble that our loved ones are best and truest to us. Do not, I pray you, shut Rica out from sharing this grief with you."

He turned and looked into her pleading eyes, his own wild with an unspoken pain.

"It would not be fair, not just to her! I could not, could not, Gertrude! All through these past months of sunshine, I have been loving her; hoarding up, as it were, my treasure, till I could lay it at her feet fearlessly, feeling sure that I could make her life happy; and now, now—do you think I would speak now, offering her such an insult?"

"Why, Malcolm, I would love my husband all the more for a trouble like this, and any true woman would feel the same. I think," (her voice growing gentler and more pleading), "I think Rica is lonely, and feels your keeping away from her very keenly."

"Do you think she cares, Gertrude?"

"Cares? Why, Malcolm, I know that her heart is full of care and sympathy and kindness for you, and that she longs to tell you it all, but cannot, because, you see, you have so shut yourself away from her."

"And I love her so! I love her so!" he moaned to himself.

There was a soft step on the stairs, and Rica opened the door.

"We are waiting to hear what you have learned, Rica. Shall I go to Mrs. De Lancey?"

"No, she is lying down, and is quite calm—too calm, I fear."

"I hear Elwood at the door," cried Gertrude suddenly, and she ran out, closing the door after her and leaving poor Rica standing in the middle of the room, while Malcolm, wide-eyed, gazed at her from the window.

She was the first to recover herself and to speak.

"Malcolm, I am so sorry for you!" she said simply, and her voice seemed the sweetest music the young man had ever heard. "I cannot tell you how sorry! But never mind, life is not all dark; the sunshine will come again by and by."

He went near to her, holding out his hand.

"Is it so, Rica? How you comfort me! I thought all the sunshine had gone out forever, but your face and voice and the touch of your kind hand tell me of hope."

He held her hand with a caressing touch, looking upon it as one might look upon some precious thing to be resigned.

"The hand of a pure, true woman, spotless from any wrong, white with the sunlight of good deeds, and free from any shadow. It must never come near to evil or to disgrace!"

"Malcolm, if I could go to your brother, I would; and hold out my hands to clasp his own, saying, 'Rise up, dear friend, and seek the right and the light!' and do you not think I should be purer and better myself, by just so much of help and hope which I could give to a fallen brother?"

She allowed him to retain her hand in his caressing hold while he spoke, and his thirsty

heart drank in each sweet refreshing word; then he bent his head to touch his lips to that pure hand, but what he might have said was prevented utterance by the entrance of Gertrude and her husband.

XXIV.

GRIFFITH DE LANCEY wrote to his wife; she alone of all the world, he said, would understand and forgive him. He wanted her; if she could come to him there in the far, strange land whither he had fled, he would reveal all to her; and perchance they might make a new beginning, they two who had once before begun life with such fair hopes and promises. It was a suppressed cry of agony, shame, and love; none saw the wife reading it, with tear-blinded eyes, and white, quivering lips; for Rica, having placed the letter in her hands, kissed her, whispering, "Be strong!" and then withdrew to an adjoining room, where she could hear if she were called, or if any need should come for her.

The husband's cry from over the deep waters roused the frail woman and seemed to give her courage and strength. She sent for Malcolm, and said to him when he had read the letter, "I am going to him, Malcolm; will you help me?"

"Yes, my sister, I will."

Then she asked for Doctor Dorman, and to him she said what she could say to no one else. Her pale face took on a look of calm after that hour spent with her aged rector, and she said, "Let me have my dear friends in a last service of Holy Communion before I go, that they may afterward remember me when in that Blessed Sacrament they kneel pleading for all who are in trouble, sorrow, or need."

That was such a service as Gertrude Everson had never before known; it moved her strangely, though she perversely strove to hide her emotion when the keen-eyed and ever-watchful sisters were noticing her. She had long ago ceased to give them credit for any kind motive or intention; she felt that they only wished to coerce her, to insist on her attendance at the Church services, and whether this were true or not, the effect of her opposing determination was the same.

Her husband hailed with gratitude the slight calm which fell over the troubled waters during this period of Mrs. De Lancey's need. He made an effort to be present at this solemn service requested by Mrs. De Lancey. He was her husband's old friend; they had spent many happy hours together, many sacred ones too within the courts of

the Lord's house; he longed now to do all that was left him for the wife whom a calamity far worse than death had overtaken.

The aged rector was so overcome by his emotion that he was obliged to pause many times during the sad and solemn service. His thoughts would go back to the clear, unshadowed past! How often had he administered those "holy mysteries" to Griffith De Lancey! How often had he bade him "Do this, in remembrance of" the blessed Master! How often, indeed, had he looked into the young man's face and thought, "Here is one who will ever stand by the Church, helping her with his strength and generosity and love!"

Alas, who knoweth the weakness of man's heart? Only One, who can also forgive unto the uttermost!

For the time, Gertrude Everson forgot her scorn for the man whose forms of devotion had so often offended her; indeed she told herself that her indignation was not so much against the man as against the system in which he had been educated.

"Can that be helpful and true which teaches that a mere posture or form of any sort has any value? Of course it is proper enough to observe certain of these things; we are all naturally inclined to change our position, and to act reverently

when we pray, but why do these people spoil all that, and rob it of its meaning by posturing so incessantly, both in season and out of season?"

If Gertrude had only addressed such questioning observations to one or other of the Everson family, possibly in due time some enlightenment might have come to her. Even Sylvie and Stewart recognized this, but both were too fond of her, and too fearful of adding a feather's weight to her anxiety, to tell her what they thought and felt.

"If Trudie would just say that very thing to Miss Rica, or to her husband," Stewart would exclaim sometimes when he had watched the pretty, dearly-loved face pass from sight bearing traces of the conflict, "I venture to predict that she would find her way out of this maze. One hates to suggest it to her, but I do really wish she would talk to Everson of these things! He is such a first-rate, sensible fellow, and, as the school-girls say, he 'just perfectly worships' Trude. I don't believe he has any idea of how she is fretted with these things, nor how his people worry her with their persistence."

It will be seen that Mr. Yates took a rather one-sided view of what he called "these things." Perhaps he was not wholly to blame for that, since he could not very well obtain any view from the

other side, the stand-point for which was within the quiet, unseen precincts of the daily life of the Everson household!

Thus there seemed little hope of "these things" improving, or of any better understanding being arrived at between the sisters-in-law.

When the gentle lull which all unconsciously Griffith De Lancey had created, (the usual good which lies hidden somewhere behind every dark cloud) reached and passed its climax in that solemn service, matters suddenly resumed their accustomed aspect.

To the very last, Mrs. De Lancey's friends grouped about her, clasping hands in this sweet service of love and forgetting all differences for the time being. Nothing was left undone which kindness and pity could suggest. Quickly, almost without preparation, she took her little ones with eager, trembling hands and started to go to her husband. What mattered it to her that the world said harsh things of him, that people stood aghast at his crime; nay, that possibly prison-doors waited to open to him? What mattered it to her that his old friends and acquaintances spake wonderingly together, searching for a reason, an excuse perhaps, accounting for that sin which had blackened his bright name? She did not seek for

either word or excuse yet, she must get to him; he had called for her, he wanted, needed her; she was his wife, she must go; nay, she found strength and life in the thought of going. She also wanted him. Oh, wondrous love of woman! This frail creature who seemed about to sink under the sudden blow, now rose up mighty in her love and started upon her long journey without one moment's hesitation. Once only, and to Malcolm, did she speak of any blame which might possibly attach to the man she loved. Malcolm was going with her, he had announced. It was evidently what they all expected, and she said nothing then, but when she and Malcolm were together, with no others near, she said to him, "Malcolm, you are very kind to go with me, and I shall be glad of your care as far as B——, there you must leave me. See!" and she handed him her husband's letter, in which he said he would meet her at the next station, only a few miles from B——

"And why may I not go on from B—— with you, Alice?"

Her breath came in quick, hard gasps, and her cheeks burned with spots of vivid color.

"Because, Malcolm, you are a man, and men, even brothers, have such hard, rigid ideas of

things; they cannot overlook and let things go and say nothing, as women can; you must let me go on alone, my dear brother." He knew that she was right; he could scarcely have met his brother without a reproach; his keen sense of honor, his hurt and shamed dignity, all the eager manhood that was in him, would rise up to censure the brother who had wrought such havoc, who had brought shame upon his family, his friends, his Church, and his Christian name.

No one was told of this plan. Little talking was done among the faithful few who stood with Mrs. De Lancey till the last, and bade her God-speed when she started. Only the repetition of kind, earnest comforting words, then the old rector's last trembling prayer and his blessing, the clasp of loving hands, a gush of blinding tears, Malcolm's strong tender arms, which lifted her like a child and placed her in the carriage, and all was over at this end of the broken chain.

She had gathered the poor, glittering links in her faithful hands, and she was going to him with her woman's deathless love and trust, to bind all together again, supplying all that lacked and was lost by her own boundless grace and generosity. God grant to her, and to every other such woman, strength and wisdom sufficient unto the task.

XXV.

ALAS, that the sunlight wrought of Christian love and sympathy should die away so soon! It would seem that the generous feeling which had helped Mrs. De Lancey to bear her trial, and which made her departure comparatively easy, must have lived on, helping other burden-bearers, making other crosses lighter, smoothing away roughness and "all uncharitableness," but it did not. Whose fault?

Doctor Dorman had gone away to try what change of scene and rest from all labor would do for him. The vestry decided, after careful deliberation, that the whole charge should be given, for the present at least, into the hands of Mr. Sherwood.

The rector had always shown confidence in his assistant; he was a faithful, tireless worker, and had given evidence of a real interest in all the affairs of the parish, more especially since the recent trouble. The congregation generally agreed

with the decision of the vestry; at all events they were scarcely in a position to be severely critical, had they felt any such inclination, and there appeared to exist a desire for generous and amicable action.

From all this agreeable and united state of affairs, it must be acknowledged that Mrs. Gertrude Everson had deliberately excluded herself; deliberately and yet with a certain grief and foreboding. She saw how her husband's relatives were watching her at this critical period, and considered it unjust and ungenerous of them.

"Only another instance," she said to herself, "of that partial and bigoted enthusiasm which their ecclesiastical system produces. They are overflowing with generosity and leniency toward this young man, but they can scarcely be just to me, or make the least allowance for my likes and dislikes."

It was the Sunday on which she went with her husband to his own Church. The beauty and the peacefulness of the fair day of rest were somewhat marred for her, even from its very beginning. Still and beautiful was the wintry sunshine and the pleasant hush which sealed the usual daily occupations, but no calm came to Gertrude's spirit.

She struggled bravely against the feeling which

oppressed her, but she did not realize just where the trouble lay. She felt hurt, wronged, ill-judged. Her husband saw that she was not as bright as it was natural for her to be, but he wisely forbore to remark upon the fact. He conjectured the probable cause, and sighed weariedly as he wondered how long it would be before this wife whom he so loved would learn to care for those things which were all-important to him.

While he was thus thinking, Gertrude stood by the window waiting for the breakfast bell and debating with herself whether she should ask a favor of Elwood or not.

"It surely ought not to be much to ask of one who has been a husband less then eight months. Such a favor, too, it would seem might be granted even before the asking."

So she argued with herself, and found a willing listener, and easy convert.

"Elwood," she began, turning suddenly, with the flush of a quick decision upon her cheek, "would it be asking too much to request you to go with me to—to the—Presbyterian Church this morning? You don't know how I dislike the idea of listening to Mr. Sherwood; I am quite sure I shall neither enjoy the service nor derive any benefit from it."

She moved slightly towards him, with a pretty pleading manner which he usually delighted to notice. It failed to charm him that morning. Alas, he was never again to be charmed by it as he had been. He felt irritated and the very strength of his love made it more difficult for him.

"If I only loved her less!" he cried within himself, and was angry—vexed that he did not love her less.

"My dear wife, you indeed ask too much! One must have a certain regard for appearances, for one's friends, for what is just and right, and—"

"I beg your pardon then for asking such a thing," she interrupted. "I did not comprehend We will say no more about it."

He was startled at the quick change in her face; though her voice was gentle and calm, it was as if a breath of ice had touched her, taking the warmth from her words and smile. Instantly, with a strong revulsion, the whole force of his tender love tided back in a flood which threatened to overwhelm reason, sense, propriety, everything; he was almost alarmed at the intensity of his passion.

"My darling, I have hurt you! I did not mean it; I spoke too hastily. We will talk over this, and think what is right."

His arm was about her, and they stood together in the fresh morning sunlight. She had much ado to keep back the tears, but she determined to be brave and to bear this which had been added. It was such a little thing to ask, and she had thought he would agree to it without hesitation. After this, what did any thing matter?

"No, Elwood, we will do as you think best; it can't make much difference, after all."

He was vexed with himself for speaking without more consideration. He would try to make it all right, he thought.

The sisters appeared cheerful and somewhat talkative at breakfast. Grace was evidently slightly excited, and the others seemed quite sympathetic.

"It is not to be supposed that our Grace will pine for Doctor Dorman!" said Mrs. Richards, with a little meaning smile.

"It would be a very foolish thing to do, when we have such an excellent substitute," answered Grace frankly, with a laugh and a blush.

"Yes, I doubt if the vestry could have done a wiser thing than to put every thing into Mr. Sherwood's hands," said Mrs. Everson the elder, speaking with a calm, unbiased judgment.

Her son thought this was his opportunity.

"Well, you all seem so very amicable, so enthu-

siastic indeed, and there is a prospect of things going on all right without us, so I guess that Gertrude and I will go to hear old Doctor Grey this morning."

Before Gertrude herself could add any word, a "whole torrent of exclamations," as she afterwards expressed it to Sylvie, burst forth from the others and effectually silenced her.

"Nonsense, Wood! You can't certainly intend to do so marked a thing as that; it will be a direct insult to Mr. Sherwood."

Gertrude's lip curled.

"I should suppose that in some slight sense it might be supposed to be required of you to be present on this occasion, since there is nothing to prevent," said Grace, sarcastically.

"Why, certainly it is required of him, and he knows it. I think he is only teasing us," said Mrs. Richards, catching a glimpse of the pain in her brother's face, behind its forced smile.

"Oh, yes, my son will do his duty, I have no doubt of that," spoke the mother, with her quiet assurance.

"I shall not hinder him, for I am going to your Church," said Gertrude coldly. "You might have saved yourselves the trouble of all this excitement!"

"I offered to go with Gertrude to Doctor Grey's, as I know she is not partial to Mr. Sherwood, but you see she is too generous to allow it."

Elwood spoke with a pleading look into his wife's face, but she scarcely seemed to notice it.

"Well, I must say I am surprised that you should think of such a thing, Elwood! and on this especial Sunday, too! when every one should make an effort to be in his place!"

"Spare him your reproaches and know that the fault was entirely mine, and now if you will excuse me, mother, I will go and prepare myself for the service of this quite immaculate Church, among whose prominent members may be found forgers, and I know not what other high-toned individual Christians."

She ended with a little laugh which had no music in it, and her husband followed her from the table with a new strange pain at his heart. The whole bright world seemed to be turning dark and cold.

Poor Grif! was the Church of Christ to bear the shame, the reproach of his great error, and was his wife, his loved and honored Gertrude, to become so bitter, so blinded, that she could not see the Church apart from this man's sin? He had never heard her use such harsh words before. He

longed to see her looking at this thing with her old clear, unbiased vision.

"My darling, we are the Church militant now, fighting daily, hourly, against the sins that tempt us. Now and then one fails, falls under temptation too strong for him, as poor Griffith did, but that does not blacken the whole body. Those who are stronger ought to help the weak and the fallen ones, and thus the Church may keep her Master's way, all through the weary battle of life and at last become the Church triumphant."

He sat down by her side, taking her hand in his while he spoke. Her lips trembled, and she could not look up into his tender, sorrowful face; she knew she had been unjust, wrong. Her heart yearned toward this strong, true husband, whose love of her made him at times almost weak!

"Yes, Elwood, I suppose I did speak harshly, but they aggravate me so. Never mind; let us not talk of it; it will do no good."

Gertrude had not lost her sense of what was right and just, but knew quite well that she owed an apology to her mother-in-law for the manner in which she had spoken on leaving the breakfast table.

She now left the room and went to seek the elder lady. There was ample time before they

started for service to perform this duty, and so to relieve her mind of at least one of its burdens.

Elwood's mother received her kindly, and giving her a chair, sat down by her side. There was an atmosphere of peace in the mother's room. Havens of rest are they all, these blessed "mothers' rooms." If Gertrude had had one to go to in her girlhood troubles, perchance she would now have been wiser and more tender toward the erring.

Even now there waited for her in this mother's room such safe counsel and gentle persuasion as she would have done well to follow.

When she had offered her apology, expressing regret for her too hasty words, Mrs. Everson replied, "That is all right, my dear. I knew you were vexed and harassed, and said what you did not wholly mean. But now that you and I are alone together, let me say a word of advice, which may perhaps keep you from future trouble. You will let an old woman speak, one who has been married so many years and who has gone over all the ground before you. My child, do not try your husband's love too much! He is only human, and a man's patience has its limits; try to make his likings your own, to merge more your wishes in his, to have a care for that which you see is dear to him. A true man's love only grows more and

stronger by these wise means, and a woman never loses by yielding to her husband's wishes. You will know, my child, that I speak for your own good, and you will, I am sure, take kindly what I say?"

"Certainly," replied Gertrude rather stiffly. "I appreciate your kind intentions, and I will try to follow you advice."

Then, as she rose to go, the mother detained her, to kiss her cheek, and to say, "You know, Gertrude, that we all love you, and want you to be one of us, and as happy as is possible."

"Yes, mother, I know, I understand," and suddenly a great yearning came over her, her pulses beat fast, her eyes filled with tears and she could with difficulty repress a sob. She hastened away, her heart oppressed with a strange sense of desolation, as of being in her husband's household, yet not of it.

XXVI.

IT is difficult to explain that "continual dropping" which wears away the stone; the word, the sneer, the small insinuation, the little here and the little there, which are not much in themselves, but which in the aggregate weigh down the heart and exhaust the patience.

It was sad to see the brightness dying away gradually from the old home; to find no special cloud, and yet to know that the sunlight was growing dim, for who could lay a hand here or there and say, "This is the trouble, behold the cause!"

There had been a more definite increase of the cloud since that memorable Sunday morning when young Mr. Sherwood had assumed full charge of St. Ann's. It seemed hardly possible for Gertrude or her sisters-in-law to forget the harsh sayings which had passed between them on that occasion; not that alone either, but those very words ap-

peared to act as seeds sown to produce other scenes of harshness. Worst of all was the state of affairs between Gertrude and her husband; they loved each other quite as well as ever—such love as theirs does not die in a day—and yet, alas, that such shadows should be allowed to lie over it, darkening all its beauty and grace! Something had come between them. Was it his unguarded reply to her request of that Sunday morning? He had tried, in his reserved yet tender manner, to atone for whatever sudden brusqueness in his remark might have hurt her. He had tried to prove how true he was to her in every fibre of his being, how all his thoughts and wishes revolved about her, and that life would be scarcely life at all without her. She responded to his love kindly and gently, but the bird-like gayety of her laugh and song was gone; a strange reserve had come over her; she was not fretful nor fault-finding with her husband, but she seemed constrained, not at her ease.

He hoped, prayed, that it might pass, that she would recover her old light-hearted way, he took her everywhere—to the opera, to oratorios, concerts, to the homes of their gayest friends and acquaintances. She acceded to his requests, smiled in his presence, and was apparently contented

enough to have suited many a less demanding husband.

But the feeling of enmity and opposition between the sisters-in-law increased daily; it was chiefly through a lack of understanding one another. Elwood's sisters, and his mother too in a less degree, supposed that Gertrude was determined to oppose and to reject all Churchly advances, to have none of them, to steel her heart against them; "and," said they, "it is not right. As the wife of a devout and sincere Churchman, she ought to fight against any such inclinations, to put them down with a strong hand and a resolute will, to use every opportunity possible for acquainting herself with these things which are dear to him."

Arguing thus, they never ceased urging Gertrude to attend the various services, placing matters before her in those lights which to them were so clear and convincing, even on certain occasions almost insisting on her accompanying them; and when she on her part also insisted on refusing, they were not sparing with angry or contemptuous reproaches. Rica alone must be excepted from these charges; she never ventured on any reproval or reproach more stern than a regretful silence, which hurt her sister-in-law far more, yet did not anger nor vex her. Sometimes, but rarely, a slight

return of the old affectionate familiarity between Gertrude and Rica would bring about a talk upon some Church subject or a Church day, when one would venture to plead for what she so loved, in her gentle simple-hearted way; and the other to put her off, as she had done many times before, with light words and kind laughter; but those pleasant occasions grew less frequent, and Rica's own private cause for anxiety made her more thoughtful and quiet than usual.

Gertrude, finding that her husband's sisters were evidently determined to force her into the Church, naturally rebelled against it, and began to feel less and less inclined to see any good of any kind in that most ancient and catholic body. She would not allow herself to examine any more the little Prayer Book which she had procured for herself in happier days with such loving and honest intentions; she perversely turned from any discussion of either fast or festival; she would not, so she said, "allow others to lead her whither they pleased; she was quite capable of judging and of learning for herself; she despised bigotry and proselytism; she could reason things out for herself if necessary, but she would not be driven to accept any system of worship, nor any religious doctrine."

Then, as her heart grew tender at the thought of her husband, "If Elwood and I were away by ourselves, it would be so different! He knows they are wrong! He cannot but see how they prejudice me against the very things they would have me accept, and yet he is so fearful of hurting their feelings, so anxious for peace and harmony, that he will not say a word of rebuke to them. It is not right! He should stand by his wife, and make things easier for her! His mother and sisters are so much to him!" and her foolish, jealous heart would begin to ache.

Sylvie's faithful heart ached almost equally, in sympathy, and Stewart, always partial to Gertrude and proud of her bright wit and loveliness, expressed his feeling in no measured terms.

"I don't care, Trudie, how much of a Churchwoman you become, I shall never say a word nor smile a smile against any forms you may choose to take upon yourself, but I would not, if I were you, allow myself to be worked upon by designing women. Be independent, whatever you are."

"Sylvie would say, 'Be peaceful, whatever you are,'" answered Gertrude, with a sad little smile at her sister. "I hate disagreements, dear, as much as you do, but I do not see how it is to be helped, unless we separate."

"Could you come home to us for a while, Trudie? Would it do? Would Elwood be hurt at the suggestion, do you think?"

Sylvie asked the sudden questions half breathlessly, because of their very audacity. She was too faithful, too happy a wife herself not to realize the full weight which attached to her words, and yet she wanted her sister to get back her old girlhood gayety and gladness.

"What do you mean, you darling old Sylvie? Am I to come back here by myself—just as if—it—hadn't been at all, or are we to come, Elwood and I, to live here with you and Stewart and this blessed young Prince?" she broke down completely, catching up, in her old way, the wondering child and striving to hide her quivering lips and overflowing eyes behind his sunny tresses.

It was all a very vague talk, yet it held a suggestion—a faint, dim suggestion which grew and enlarged gradually to proportions of a startling reality in the mind of the unhappy wife. Was it a suggestion of the devil, or was it a wise and honorable purpose, leading out to better and higher things, a means to an end, the inspiration of a good spirit which never wholly forsakes the Christian in his darkest hour of need? Who shall say?

"Unless we separate!" Gertrude had uttered the words thoughtlessly, half in jest, half in a reckless despair which seemed to hedge her way on every side.

"Unless we separate!" They came back to her later, when she sat alone in the room which her husband had taken such pains to adorn and make pleasant for her.

Separate? Oh no, they could never do that; she could not, for she loved him too well; for him, well, she was not so sure. He had loved her when they were married, such a little, little while ago; perhaps he loved her yet, but there were so many other affections to engross him—his mother and his sisters—he was so careful of their feelings, he could not (or would not) stand out against any of their foolish whims, their persistency about Church customs! If he loved her, surely he would take her part, and be more thoughtful for her likes and dislikes! What was a service more or less, a saint's day, or a high festival even, compared with her happiness and comfort?

If he had taken such a stand, she knew she would soon have learned to care for the Church and to enjoy its services! She had been inclined that way; it only needed a little care and attention on her husband's part, and a little less of in-

terference and thrusting on the part of his sisters !

No, they could not separate, but might she not go away for a while, just for a time, to try to recover from the disappointments which had spoiled her married life ? She could not suggest any other way of living, for she knew Elwood never would leave his mother; besides, the old home belonged to him, and should a change be suggested, it would seem like a thought of turning his mother away from it. No least word of hers should ever do that ! She loved Elwood's mother, and could have found it in her heart to be a very fond, very devoted daughter-in-law, had not these other matters risen up to interfere.

While she sat quietly brooding over these things, she heard the door of an adjoining room open, and voices speaking somewhat unguardedly. Her own door was partly open, and evidently the speakers supposed she was not in. She sat in the shadow, leaning wearily back in a great easy chair. It was a strange voice which first fell upon her ear, and the words it uttered were these, " He seems to me greatly changed—so sad and absorbed ! I knew he was much attached to Mr. De Lancey, yet I felt that could not wholly account for the change in him."

"No," that was Mrs. Everson's voice, and a sigh followed the single word, then other words which smote Gertrude's heart, yet she had no alternative but to hear them, unless she betrayed her presence, and the time taken for questioning which she should do, made it too late.

"No, I fear my son's marriage has not made him happy. No one should marry out of the Church; trouble is sure to come of it. We have hoped for the best, but Elwood is a disappointed man, and—"

Gertrude, in an agony of shame and fear, thrust her hands tightly over her ears and held her breath until the two ladies, still speaking, had passed along the hall and down stairs. Then she rose softly, locked her door, and knelt with bowed head by the chair where she had sat.

XXVII.

SHE had arrived at her decision before it was quite time for her husband to return. Then she arose, and began to dress for dinner. Her eyes were dry and her cheeks burned; she trembled violently at first, but finally conquered that, and made her toilet calmly and carefully. She bathed her head and tried to appear bright.

"I must think clearly, I must have no silly, girlish headache," she said to herself, "I must at last do the right thing."

She went down stairs to meet her husband when she heard his key in the door; his tender kiss sent a thrill of pain through her heart, but she smiled, and answered, "Yes, dear, quite well," in reply to his affectionate inquiry. When they sat down at dinner, she glanced at him furtively now and then, to note the change in his face of which they had spoken, and all through the conversation she continually heard those terrible words: "My son's marriage has not made him happy!" Each one at

the table seemed to be repeating them to her. She answered questions, took her part mechanically in the conversation, yet all the while seemed to hear nothing save those words, those few awful words. What is it now to her that Jessie speaks in her emphatic way, as if calling every one to pay attention, of the coincidence of Ash Wednesday and the festival of St. Matthias coming on the same day?

What does it matter now, all this talk of plans for keeping the Lenten fast, Grace's enthusiasm over the card of services, which Mr. Sherwood has made so very excellent, or Rica's pleasure at the fact that several members of her Sunday School class had become candidates for confirmation, which would take place about Easter? None of these Churchly events, however long they kept place in the conversation, seemed to trouble young Mrs. Everson that evening.

Several times her husband looked at her somewhat inquiringly, as if wondering if she were wearying of the subject, but her face was calm, though he thought her color greater than usual, and when, as they passed from the dining-room, he took her hand in his own, he exclaimed, "Why, Gertrude, how hot your hands are! Are you feverish?"

"Oh no, I think not. Possibly I have a little cold."

"Perhaps you had better be quiet then. Would you like to sit in your room and let me read to you?"

"Oh no, thank you, Elwood; that would be too selfish! We had better stay with the others to-night?"

And why to-night? he wondered. Perhaps because Lent would begin to-morrow, and then the many services and duties would not allow of their all sitting together often of an evening. It was thoughtful of her, he said to himself, and drew her to him fondly.

She shivered involuntarily.

"Why, my darling, you have taken cold!" he exclaimed solicitously, and she had to submit to be taken care of, and to receive some precautionary dose which her mother-in-law brought, in her usual kindly way.

"Ah yes," spake Gertrude's evil spirit sneeringly, "this all looks very amicable, but am I not the cruel wife who has made your son unhappy and his marriage a disappointment?"

The evening passed quietly, and though Church topics were naturally the principal ones of the general conversation, Gertrude showed no resent-

ment, as she had on other similar occasions; her heart was too full of other and bitter thoughts. She passed a somewhat restless night, and looked so ill in the morning that Elwood suggested she should not go down to breakfast, but have a cup of coffee in her room.

She was very glad to yield to his suggestion, though she made light of her indisposition and tried to laugh at his fears.

"Do not have the least anxiety about me, dear husband," she said to him at parting, and he wondered at her earnest manner as she placed her hands on his shoulders and looked up into his eyes.

"Dear little wife, how can I help feeling anxious?' he said fondly.

"Oh, but you must not; remember I say so; there is no cause for any anxiety; I shall be all right. Good-bye, dear." He remembered afterward an unusual affection and tenderness in her kiss. He went away with a lighter heart that Ash Wednesday morning. He had said that he would attend service at a down-town church, as his letters must be received at the office, and he would not have time to come up to St. Ann's. This he had said at the breakfast table, and repeated it to Gertrude up-stairs; she was relieved to find that he would be away all day; she wondered,

with a little trembling half smile, how much of a reprimand he had received down-stairs for his purpose to stay from St. Ann's for a service elsewhere. Or had his sisters been more lenient, in consideration of his wife not being present to share the reproof?"

"I am always the culprit, there is little doubt of that!" she said, her cheek flushing at the thought of certain well-remembered words of censure.

"Well, I shall give them all a great relief, not for their sakes though, but for his whom I have disappointed and made unhappy."

She dared not, however, let her thoughts dwell upon Elwood; she could not bear it, and her time was limited.

She had completed many little arrangements before Rica came to her room, as Gertrude knew she would, to see how she was, and to ask if there were anything which she or mother could do for her.

"You are really ill, Trudie, and I shall stay from service this morning to take care of you!"

"Thank you very much, Rica, but you shall do nothing of the sort. You may do something else for me, however, if you will."

"'If I will?' Why, Trudie, my dear sister!"

"Ah yes, I know; but this is—well, have you half an hour to spare for me, Rica?"

"Certainly, dear."

"And will you promise to keep a little secret which I am going to tell you—at least to keep it in your own true heart as long as you can?"

Rica, whose guessing passed far wide of the mark, answered readily—"Yes, Trudie, I think I may promise you that; but you are growing whiter every minute. Let me get you something!"

She gave her a little wine, and then sat down by her side, as Gertrude requested.

"Rica, you must not interrupt me, please; I must say it all quickly, or I shall not be able. I haven't much courage, but I feel that I am doing what is my duty; the best thing I know how to do. So neither must you try to oppose me; it will do no good.

Yesterday, Rica, I heard your mother tell some one (I sat here with my door partly open, and I could not help hearing,) that I had no right to marry Elwood; that he should have married some one in the Church; and that he was unhappy through his marriage, and a disappointed man. Hush dear, don't speak yet; you can't unsay it! I have thought it all over; I cannot stay with him —with you all—any longer. It would kill me! I

am sorry; I did not understand, or I never would have married him. Wait!"

She was fast breaking down, and she held up a warning hand to Rica not to interrupt her; going on, with rapid, broken sentences, trying to keep back the sobs which half-choked her utterance:

"I am going away. I want him to try—if—he will be happier without me; to try it really, thoroughly, honestly. He must not—no one must —worry about me. I am going—not to Sylvie—but away where I shall be alone and quiet, and have time to think. There will be no need for anxiety, and as for others, outside people, say to them that I am gone for my health. It is true; I could not—could not, Rica, live here among you now; my heart is breaking!"

"Oh Trudie, my sister—my dear sister!"

It was all Rica could say; she was so utterly taken by surprise that she found no words to express her pain, no way of urging Gertrude to re-consider her decision. It was just as well, for Gertrude's mind was made up, and nothing that her sister-in-law could say would cause her to change it.

"Rica, my best of sisters, my true friend, you must not worry for me, nor grieve; I shall be better away from you all and more contented, know-

ing that I am not vexing you nor hindering Elwood."

"But Trudie, there is a mistake; there must be! Mother never meant—"

"Yes, Rica, mother did mean just that hard thing which she said. Don't try to change things; but listen! I want you to keep it from them all, dear, as long as you can. Go to church, and—pray for me! It is the time for self-denials, you say; this, then, shall be my denial; I will deny myself my—husband, and go away to keep my fast."

She spoke not in derision, but with a deep sadness.

"When at last you are home from church, and must tell them, Rica, do it as kindly for me as you can, and tell it gently for Elwood; do not let him be vexed or grieved over it. He will come to see the wisdom of it, after a while. It will leave him free to please his sisters. Dear, you must not cry; you will be obliged to go soon. Listen, Rica; I am going to Sylvie's while you are at church, to say good-bye, and to let her know where I shall be; but she will never tell any one; then I shall go. Oh, Rica, sister, think of me as kindly as you can!"

She was completely exhausted, and sank back in her chair panting with dry, half-frightened eyes, and cheeks which paled and flushed alternately.

"Don't persuade, dear; just sit here by me a little and let me remember how good and patient you have been to me"

"Oh no, no; I have not! I have been too eager —we all have—to get you to like our way; I have been exacting, and thoughtless, and selfish! And what did it matter after all? What does anything matter, so we but live together happily and peacefully, loving each other and doing right?"

"Never mind, Rica dear, all will be right some day. Kiss me now and go. I can bear no more!"

Rica felt stunned, bewildered, as if she were walking in a dream. She put her arms about her old friend, and thoughts of all the happy school days and the pleasant companionship came back in one tumultuous wave. Only the recollection of her promise to Gertrude and her simple desire to serve her in some way kept her from weeping hysterically.

"Good-bye, dear sister, kind friend! Tell him —it is all right"

Gertrude, with a last kiss, pushed her sister gently to the door, and when she had closed and fastened it, she gave way to her first uncontrollable tears, which relieved her aching and over-tired brain.

Less than an hour afterward she heard the

mother and sisters pass from their rooms and start for Church. Rica kept her counsel well, for Gertrude heard Mrs. Everson's anxious voice asking, "Are you sure she has all she needs, my child? Could I not do something? I dislike leaving her so."

And Rica's low reply, "I am sure not, mother; it will be best of all for her if she can sleep, or is sleeping."

Faithful Rica! Having given her promise, she would keep it, if possible, no matter at what cost of pain to herself, and Gertrude knew well how little of her accustomed pious pleasure Rica would find in the service of the Church that morning! Perhaps, however, she would find some comfort; Gertrude hoped so.

When the Church bells had ceased ringing, the young wife who was deliberately forsaking the duties of wifehood rose and dressed for her strange journey. She carried only a satchel. Sylvie could send more by and by. Upon her husband's desk she left a letter for him; it had somewhat more of warmth and tenderness than the farewell with which she had entrusted Rica for him.

XXVIII.

IT would be a difficult, an almost impossible, undertaking to try to describe Sylvie Yates' feelings when her sister's plan was unfolded to her. She saw—as Rica had seen—that any attempt at dissuasion would be useless. The utmost which she could induce her sister to yield, was to allow Stewart to go with her on part of the journey.

After a strange, sorrowful attempt at a meal together, the two sisters left little "Prince" in charge of his nurse, and went to Mr. Yates' place of business.

Two white, tear-stained faces, closely veiled, were turned to meet Mr. Yates' cheerful, unsuspecting countenance, but Stewart Yates was a kind-hearted man, little given to questioning other people's actions or motives. It came to pass that by the time Elwood Everson, with a heart somewhat lighter than usual, despite the remembrance

of his wife's slight indisposition, started for home that evening, Gertrude was far upon the journey which was taking her from him by her own deliberate choice.

Stewart had persuaded her that if it were only "for appearance' sake," she must allow him to go with her to the journey's end, and to order her room at the place which she had selected.

"It is a quiet little rural hotel where Elwood and I stayed last fall. I will take a room there, for the present, at any rate; and if some of the kind people will afterward take me in to board in their family, so much the better."

"But, dear child, doesn't your husband come here at times, and isn't he in constant communication with his people here?"

"Only with his foreman, Mr. Hopson; and I will make it all right with him. Elwood will not visit here very soon, I think."

A spasm of pain crossed her face, and she turned away from her kind, watchful brother-in-law.

He was very sorry for her, although he could not see either the wisdom or the satisfaction of the step she was taking.

He thought suddenly, as he looked at her pretty face, of three or four "first-rate fellows," Presby-

terians, honorable and respected, with fair prospects before them, who would any one of them have counted it a white day in his calendar had Gertrude Preston looked upon him with favor.

"And any one of them would have made her a good husband, such an one as she needs, one whose bringing-up has been like her own, and who could understand her as she could him,"—he said to himself, half angry at—well, he did not know just who or what!

It was at the same hour in which Gertrude and her husband had arrived at the little station among the hills. It all rushed upon her suddenly as they alighted and took the one omnibus, or hack, or whatever they called the nondescript vehicle which carried all the stray visitors to the quaint little hotel.

How natural it all seemed, and yet how different! Then, the last glory of autumn lingered, beautifying and gladdening everything; now all was cold, dull, cheerless—without a forecast of the spring-time that was so near. Was it so really, or was the change made by her own empty, aching heart?

"Oh, why did I come here? Why did I choose this place?" she asked herself, as the bitter com-

parison between the past and the present made her falter and grow faint-hearted.

As if catching the echo of her thoughts, her brother-in-law said, "I am afraid you will be dull here, Trudie; it seems a stupid sort of place; you must be sure to let me know when you want me to come and take you away."

"I—I—enjoyed it when I was here before, but it does seem dull now; I suppose the difference is in myself."

"Well, don't pine away here all by yourself; that is my advice to you, Trudie; and remember that I stand ready at any minute to mount guard over you in any journey."

"Thank you, Stewart; I know; I should never hesitate to come or send to you in any case; you have always been a good brother to me."

He heard the quiver in her voice, and began speaking of other things—the rugged scenery, the winding, rushing river, and the pretty little church, as they entered the village, and he decided that there must be some hidden beauty in the place which would show itself in the spring-time.

"If you stay, Trudie, I will gladly spare Sylvie and Prince, to come and get a tonic here in this

air when the spring days begin to drag upon people."

It was not elegantly expressed, but Gertrude recognized the warm heart back of the words.

"That is good of you, Stewart; it would be pleasant to have them here. I used to think about it—"

She broke off abruptly; everything recalled that other happier time; and how, indeed, could she hope to evade the recollection? She had brought this upon herself; there was no help for it now; she must try to bear it. If she could only be left alone, to shut her eyes, and try to forget for a minute!

The grey stone church stood out clear amid the bare trees, defined against the afternoon sky. The cross seemed to hold out its arms to her, as if to say, "You cannot omit me from your life. Why not fold me to your heart, until I shall take on warmth and color from your patience, and grow light and beautiful through your love?" Why, indeed? And she was striving to leave her cross behind her, to live her life without it, to free herself from its clinging weight, though after all it is only a little while to bear,—and then the still white grave-stones there below: that was the sum of human life, the cross and the grave! She said

it to herself, and while its mournful sound echoed in her thoughts, lo! another's words came back to her, ringing with what a different tone through her heart—

"It is the Church militant now; fighting daily, hourly against the sins that tempt us. Those who are stronger ought to help the weak, and thus the Church may keep Her Master's way, and at last become the Church triumphant!"

How different was that view of life! It was the same cross and grave, but glorified and lighted up by faith and bravery and hope; it had a sound of victory, of joy in the battle-field of life, because of One whose banner gleamed brightly, ever leading on through all temptations until the militant became the triumphant."

It was very quiet at the little hotel, even more quiet than it had been in the fall, when she had stood there on its balcony, laughing and happy.

Yes, she had been a happy wife then, though at the time she scarcely realized it, because of certain dim shadows which flecked her sunlight.

Ah, if she could but get back to just that much of happiness again; but no one ever gets back; we must all go onward, onward; and if we reach to touch any joy, it must be through patient, persevering, steadfast effort towards the right.

Gertrude waited in the dim, stiff little parlor while her brother-in-law secured her a comfortable room, giving the landlord and his kind, interested wife the best reasons he could for Mrs. Everson's coming to H——. They both knew Elwood well, and remembered his wife's former visit.

"She needed a change, and she always spoke so pleasantly of your country about here, that it seems just the spot in which she ought to recruit," spake honest, generous Stewart Yates, keeping to the truth, yet shielding his young sister with all tenderness and care.

Yes, they remembered quite well how Mrs. Everson had enjoyed her stay there, "but what a pity that the young master could not have come with her; she was sure to be lonely without him, they were such a fond, happy pair."

The good people rattled on, and Stewart indulged them, listening good-humoredly; telling himself if they said it all to him, they would be less likely to trouble poor Trudie with it.

When at length he went back to Gertrude, she discovered that he had sent a dispatch to Sylvie telling her that he would not be back that night; that he had taken a room next to her own, and would be there to "see how she felt in the morning."

"Who knows?" this patient man said to himself. "Things look differently sometimes when they have been slept over, and our little Trudie may change her mind in the morning, and want to go back with me."

"Oh Stewart, how good you are! I don't deserve it!" Gertrude exclaimed, pausing at the door after he had seen her safely in her snug room, and was going back to order some supper.

"Don't you? Well, I don't know; you have been a pretty good little sister to me always, Trudie, and all I ask of you now is to be as happy as possible here; not to fret and worry more than you can help, and to send me a line every time you want a book or some music or anything—even to my wife and son!"

"You dear, dear old Stewart!" she cried, with an instant's return of that girl-gayety which had pleased him in days gone by.

He turned away laughing, but with a choking sensation in his throat which he had to get rid of before he could order the supper.

Gertrude sat, when he had gone down, with clasped hands, thinking how terribly alone she would have been if Stewart had gone, and left her that night! How glad she was, that he

had stayed; how very kind and thoughtful he was!

"What a happy woman Sylvie is, or would be if she had not me to worry her; such a husband, and no sisters-in-law nor—" well, that was all; the sisters-in-law comprehended everything in her list of grievances, she said; "for if there were no sisters-in-law, there would be no trouble to be made, and no one to make it!"

Stewart, with his kind, cheery ways, and his pleasant talk, made the evening pass as it certainly would not have passed without him. He kept her from brooding, by his constant reference to something outside of herself and her grievance, and jested about the place and the people, saying he expected her to write a book about them, with copious illustrations from life.

It was only idle chatter, apparently; but there was a generous and benevolent spirit back of it all which atoned for the levity. When at last he sent Gertrude to her room for the night, she was so taken out of herself, so wearied with the long day full of incident, and so bewildered by the new phase of life in which she had placed herself, that she soon fell asleep, and amid troubled dreams passed the night.

Mr. Yates' last words to the landlord in the

morning were these—"Take good care of Mrs. Everson; and you shall never lack for patronage. I dare say you may look for some of us here when the spring has grown inviting."

Thus was it that this erring young wife began her self-imposed exile.

XXIX.

"MOTHER, a strange thing came to me during service this morning." The Reverend Doctor Price sat down by his wife, and looked into her face with a troubled perplexity.

The gentle old lady returned his gaze wonderingly for an instant, then she said, "Yes, Roland, I see there has been something. What was it?"

He smiled at her answer.

"If I wanted ever to keep anything from you, mother, I should have to hide my tell-tale face. In forty years of married life I have not learned to conceal things from your keen, loving eyes."

"No," she answered thoughtfully. "Perhaps I look a little more closely, Roland, because of there being just the two of us. If God had given you a son to make a companion of, I dare say I should have grown less watchful."

"But God has only given me other men's sons, and though I appropriate them wholly, they lift no burden from your shoulders. When old El-

wood Everson once said to me, 'Price, if I should be taken away, and leave my boy, have a little watchful care for him, will you?' I took the lad that moment into my heart; and he has stayed there ever since, keeping strong hold of my affection through his own lovable, earnest nature."

He paused for an instant; and his wife looked at him with that patient wonder which she invariably used when awaiting the development of one of his stories.

"Mother, I think—I am quite positive—that I saw Mrs. Everson, young Mrs. Elwood Everson, in church, this morning. She sat in a pew far back, and was veiled; but I think I cannot be mistaken. She went out, I judge, during the prayer for the Church militant, and, mother, it struck me that there was something sad, something not just right, about the young lady."

"It would seem that there was something strange at least in the fact of Mrs. Everson being in the place and attending service without waiting to speak to you or making her presence known in any way; we must find out, dear, but carefully."

"Yes, mother, very carefully," repeated the clergyman, straightening his tall, fine figure, and pacing slowly back and forth.

This man had a way of getting at the troubles of his people and of giving them comfort and help as no one else could. He had never disappointed them, and they had a most perfect reverence and affection for him, because he had been to them always, and in every case, that which they needed.

When the young missionary whom the Bishop first sent to H—— had done his work, when the Church building was completed and paid for, when the Sunday School was in full running order, and all the foundation-stones of an active and thoroughly-furnished parish were laid, then the older people were desirous of having a priest, an elderly clergyman, who could take full charge, not needing any assistance from outside. Indeed the young deacon himself saw the necessity, and willingly laid the case before the Bishop. Thus it had come about that he was transferred to another parish needing a start; and the Reverend Doctor Price asked to take the position at H——. The choice had been a thoroughly wise one, and Elwood Everson, at whose suggestion the invitation to his father's friend had been presented, and who had urged that clergyman to accept this position, never regretted his effort.

Dr. Price's supposition regarding the lady whom he had seen in church that Sunday morning was

correct. Gertrude had many misgivings, and many hard contests with her inclinations, before she had decided that she could attend service that day.

"But I cannot hope to keep my presence here a secret, and I may as well face the thing at once; it will only be the harder for waiting."

The landlord's idea—fully concurred in by his good wife—respecting Mrs. Everson's health, and her hope of renewing it by a stay at H——, found ready belief with any one who saw that lady. She had changed sadly in a few day; her face had scarcely a trace of its old color; her sparkling eyes had become dull, her manner listless; she was but a faint shadow of that bright young wife who had visited H—— in the previous autumn. She had gone to service that Sunday morning, and hoped to escape observation—or at least conversation—by leaving the church during the last clauses of the closing prayer. There was the Holy Communion to follow; but alas, Gertrude did not feel quite ready for that, and probably some who knew her might go out before the final service; so she chose to take a few minutes from the prayer time, to place herself out of reach of any of these.

And now the good clergyman began to plan how to act in the wisest and kindest manner for

all concerned. Should he call at the hotel and find out if Mrs. Everson really were there? Or should he wait for another Sunday, to make sure? Or better still, should he let his wife act according to her womanly intuition? While he hesitated, a happy opportunity brought him out of the difficulty. Happy, I say; probably not so happy to all concerned as to the perplexed clergyman, for it was beside the cradle of a dying child that Doctor Price met Mrs. Everson.

She heard the next evening of the dangerous illness of the little Jones baby, the one whom she had held and tended during her former visit at the cottage. She did not hesitate long after hearing the landlady's news; she felt an interest in poor Mr. Jones and his little family, and doubtless she could cheer or help them in some way; at all events, she would go and make the effort; her life had been so barren, so empty of all interest during these last few days, that she longed for something to occupy it.

"But excuse me, dear madam, I am so fearful that you'll be taking cold, or doing too much; you look so weakly, and I promised the gentleman—"

"What gentleman?" interrupted Gertrude, with a foolish fright.

"The gentleman who came here with you,

ma'am,—your brother—he bade me take care of you, and—"

"Oh yes, that is all right, Mrs. Parsons; you are very kind to think of it. I promise you I shall take care of myself; I think the air this evening will do me good; do not worry!"

"But, bless me!" cried the astonished Mrs. Parsons to her husband as the lady went on her way, "how will ever she get home again, and the sun a-setting this very minute? She knows no more about the country than a child, and not a gentleman to come home with her!"

"I reckon my lady's a bit wilful, but don't fret; she'll find Doctor Gregory, or some one, I'll warrant, to bring her home; most likely the minister himself will be at Jones' house."

And he was, before Gertrude had been there ten minutes. He found her with the sick child in her arms, singing to it in a low, soothing tone, while its mother prepared something for its relief. The old clergyman thought it a pretty picture, as he stood at the door to notice. There was a sadness in it, deeper than that caused by the child's possibly fatal illness, a sadness which he could not name, which lay in the very beauty and grace of this woman who, far from husband and home, grasped so eagerly at this foreign care and love!

"Why, Mrs. Everson, is it you—here?" he said gently, going toward her with outstretched hand.

She grew a trifle paler, and said, with a faint smile, "Yes, Doctor Price, it is I. Do I surprise you? I think we have met in this little home before, but the poor child laughed and crowed then. Oh, why does not Doctor Gregory come?"

Evidently she did not wish to speak of herself, or of why she was in the place. He looked keenly at her face, as she bent over the suffering little one; a very sweet face, he thought, but oh, how sad, and a trifle—yes, it certainly was a trifle harder, less tender, than it had been in the first days of her married life.

Aleck Jones was about and at his work again, still somewhat lame and a little weak, but he called himself a well man. He was fretting at the delay of Doctor Gregory.

"Not a patient man yet, ma'am," said his poor wife apologetically to Gertrude, who thought his impatience altogether excusable and natural, and who noticed with a pang that glance of wifely pride which accompanied the slight word of reproval.

Doctor Gregory arrived at last, kind and bustling as usual, as tender with these poor "mill people" as with any wealthy patron whose money

was as nothing in comparison with the physician's skill. Imagine his astonishment at seeing the suffering child lying upon the arms of Mrs. Everson; yet he had so schooled himself to betray no surprise or agitation in any sick room, that he simply held out his hand saying, "How do you do, Mrs. Everson? Doing good, as usual!"

Then,—oh, how gently!—he raised the little one from her lap into his own strong arms, looking at its pinched white features with his keen eyes.

"Doctor, tell me the truth (excuse me, you always do that, sir,) but tell me quick!" exclaimed Aleck Jones, with a roughness which they all knew only covered an agony of fear and fatherly love.

"Yes, Jones, I will tell you honestly, for I know how brave a man you are. I do not think your little one can possibly live till morning, but I will stay right here and do all that is in my power, my very best, for you," as he spoke the last words with his kind touch on the father's arm, his eyes sought Mrs. Jones. Gertrude thought she had never seen such sympathy expressed in any man's face. Had she come there to learn to what pure, grand, generous heights human nature can reach? Verily, she had gone there to learn something,—much!

Then it was Doctor Price's turn. While the

weeping mother held her child, doing from time to time as the doctor suggested, the clergyman spoke a few wise and comforting words to the parents, and then knelt by the side of the dying little one to pray. What a beautiful prayer it was, that Prayer for a Sick Child! Gertrude Everson's tears fell fast as she listened.

Having done all that he could, and the hour being then late, Doctor Price said to Gertrude, "Mrs. Everson, I will take you home, if you will allow me. It is very late, and I think you ought not to stay longer."

She hesitated. "I will gladly stay, if I can do anything," she said, but the parents gratefully refused, appreciating all that she had already done.

"It would scarcely be wise in you to remain up longer, Mrs. Everson," said Doctor Gregory. "You do not look altogether well and strong. I will stay, and your kind help will really not be longer needed."

She flushed painfully under his kind, scrutinizing glance, and without saying more began to put on her wraps.

"You are staying at the hotel?" said the clergyman inquiringly, as they started out together.

"Yes, sir."

Her lips refused to utter another word; it seemed rude, yet what could she say?

Doctor Price spoke quietly and pleasantly of the sorrowing parents whom she had comforted by her kindness. Then with another effort, he said, "I think I saw you at service on Sunday morning, Mrs. Everson. Did I not?"

"Yes, sir, I was there—during part of the service."

They were nearing the hotel; he could not let her go, in that way! She had not spoken once of her husband. She seemed greatly depressed, and what was she doing there at that bleak time of year alone and unhappy? Yes, he felt sure she was unhappy! He must make one more effort—she was so young, such a mere girl, and he longed to help her, whatever was her trouble!

"It is dull and lonely here at this time of year, Mrs. Everson; I fear you will find it so; may not an old man come in to see you and chat away an hour sometime?"

She could not be ungracious, and to a clergyman.

"Thank you, Doctor Price; you are very kind; I—I knew I should be lonely when I came here; I don't think I shall mind it, but I shall be glad to see you when you have time to call."

It was not a very warm invitation, but he was not thinking of himself, he was thinking of her good.

Poor young creature, where had gone that sweet glad light from her face which he remembered so well, and that merry, girlish, rippling laugh ?

God help him to be discreet, he prayed, as he held her hand at parting and looked full into her sad eyes.

XXX.

A HAGGARD, wild-eyed man stood before Mr. Stewart Yates in his private office; there was a fierceness in the voice and in the manner which certainly were quite foreign to Elwood Everson's natural disposition. Mr. Yates felt himself to be in an unpleasant position; his simple, generous heart, swelled with pity and sympathy, and the grasp of his hand was that of a true friend, though, alas, how powerless he felt himself to offer any least consolation.

"My wife!" spake his visitor in harsh, strained tones, while he searched Stewart's face with that heart-rending, beseeching gaze of his feverish eyes. "Do you know where my wife is?"

Not for one instant did Stewart Yates pause or hesitate.

"Yes, Everson, I know where Gertrude is. She is safe and comfortable. I had no part nor lot in this matter, except simply to go with her where she chose to go; and to see that everything was

arranged for her comfort and health. I acknowledge frankly to you that I had far rather have borne almost any pain myself than to have done this thing for Gertrude!"

"Why, then, in pity's name, did you do what you so objected to?" cried the distracted husband, sinking, from sheer trembling, into the chair which he had at first refused.

"Because if I had not, she would have gone away alone," he replied, in low, gentle tones, as showing how it hurt him to give that pain to the questioning husband.

Elwood Everson leaned his head upon his hands a moment, then without raising it again said hoarsely, "Tell me all you know, please; all!"

His friend did so, striving to set it in the best possible light and to show what hope and comfort he honestly could. He might not name the place where Gertrude had gone, having been constrained to promise secrecy, yet it seemed to him not a difficult thing for Mr. Everson to find out for himself.

Every word which he uttered had the ring of a true, friendly spirit, and Elwood Everson, in the midst of his terrible pain and grief, recognized this and was grateful for it. The brother-in-law might have said hard things; he might have recalled the

fact that Gertrude Preston was a happy, trusting girl, when he had given her to Mr. Everson ; that she had never known a trouble or a care ; that no one had ever found faults in her, but that she had lived in an atmosphere of love and good-will ; he might have found occasion to censure this husband, might even have taunted him with the thought of the flown bird whose nest had been too unpleasant, too narrow for her large, glad nature !

All this and more he might have done, had he been—well, perhaps like most men; but he was not, and Elwood Everson was very thankful. It was, in truth, an extremely delicate part which Stewart Yates had to undertake that morning. Gertrude was dear to him—so dear that he sorrowed greatly and felt deeply hurt by this step which she had just taken, and thought that she had been quite wrong in so doing. Yet he could not cast any reproach upon her in the presence of this other man who loved her, who had a husband's most complete right. No, he simply could not speak at all of Gertrude's action as worthy either of censure or approval, but he could, and did, show all sympathy towards the other; and a cordial appreciation of his peculiar trial. Not one word of anything like advice did he offer, and yet Mr.

Everson was conscious of no lack of warm interest and friendship. His suggestion that Gertrude's present abiding-place would not be difficult for her husband to discover was the nearest approach to any counsel which occurred in all Mr. Yates' talk, that morning. He told Everson that his wife, Sylvie, received a communication daily from her sister, pretending not to notice the flush which crossed the husband's face at this information nor his half-suppressed groan of anguish.

When all that could be said was spoken, Mr. Everson sat in silent thought for a few minutes. How deep his grief was, who can say? Then, he arose, held out his hand with quiet dignity, and said, "I thank you." That was all. Stewart's hand closed on his with a cordial grasp.

"Come to me at any time, here, or at the house. Sylvie and I are your friends," as simply as a school-boy would have said it, but it had all the fullness of a man's strong deep feeling in it. Everson only bowed his head in acknowledgment; he could not speak; surely his burden was greater than he could bear—save for that unseen help, which is mighty to out-balance every need.

All that day Elwood Everson sat alone in his private room, and few ventured to disturb him, even upon important matters regarding the busi-

ness. With his proud head bowed, he thought and thought, until all life seemed one great cloud, without a sun-touched path through its darkness. Would not some voice speak through the blackness and tell him what to do?

As for human voices, after that first great general astonishment and consternation, when each one had spoken according to the feeling which most moved her, no tone had dared to break the awful silence in which the suffering husband had shut himself—not the dearest sister of them all, not the gentle and revered mother, ventured to utter one word. The hand of a rebuking Father was over that household, and its shadow chilled every heart. To bow with reverent sorrow, acknowledging their mistake, would alone bring them to a realization of that infinite love behind the cloud which chastened those whom it most cherished.

"Mother, mother! what shall we do? I fear for Elwood's reason! He surely cannot live so! He does not eat, and he does not sleep! I hear him pacing up and down all night. Whenever I wake, his step is still there, heavy and slow; he used not to be so regardless of those about him."

"You may make up your mind that Elwood will never again be the same regardful brother to us.

How can he? Have we not driven away that which was part of his life, that which was dearest of all the world to him?"

"Driven away! Rica, how you talk!"

"Well, Jessie, I only say what I believe to be true. It is sad enough, to make me wish it were otherwise, and I believe Wood thinks just as I do, but he is too kind ever to say it in so many bitter words, as other brothers would. He will only quietly grow away from us day by day, further and further. Oh my brother, my only brother!" cried the girl, bursting into a passion of tears.

Mrs. Richards bent over her, whispering, "Rica, have a care! Do you want to kill our mother?" for Mrs. Everson had grown deathly white as she leaned back in her chair, and no tears came to her relief. But she had greater strength than her daughter supposed. When she spoke, in a moment, it was in a calm voice, though sad beyond expression—

"My children, I think Rica is right in feeling that we have all had our own share in driving Gertrude to this foolish step. Let us each try to be willing to bear our portion of the censure, as we must bear our part in the sorrow."

"What shall we do, mother dear? Can we do nothing to help poor Wood in this time of

trouble?" asked Grace, almost impatiently. It harassed her, to sit still and bear quietly this calamity! It hurt her pride that such a thing as this should have come to their family. Indeed if, as Rica said, they each had a share in bringing about this sad state of affairs, certainly each one had a very evident part in this wounded pride, which was a hard trial for the high Everson spirit.

"The punishment is far heavier than the sin," exclaimed Jessie to herself, as she pondered her mother's words.

"We can only be patient, my child," answered the mother to Grace, "and think wherein we have failed. At present we can do nothing for Elwood, except to bear with his moods, and endeavor to lighten, if possible, his burden, studying meanwhile what our life must be, should his wife ever return to us."

"She never will!" exclaimed Rica, in a low positive tone, and when taken to task for the words, she explained, "Well, I never would, if I had been in the same position, and had been treated as we have treated Gertrude!"

"I notice, Rica, that you never except yourself, in blaming the family for Gertrude's action, perhaps, indeed, you even include Wood himself, in your censure."

"Well, I certainly do wish that Wood had done differently—in this way, to have been less easy and thoughtful toward us, and to have insisted more upon our leaving his wife to follow her own inclinations. I can see now why he oftentimes remained quiet, just out of kindness and respect to his sisters when he ought to have spoken. He just bore the whole burden of both sides, poor fellow, and hoped for the best, and he has received the worst."

"What I was going to ask was—since you see it all so clearly—in what way we could and ought to have done differently with regard to Elwood's wife?"

Rica looked thoughtful, and was half inclined to appeal to her mother, who she felt to be on her side, but the sorrowful white face forbade her.

"It is about as difficult a thing to tell, Grace, as it would be to define just how a large family should live so as to have peace and harmony always. It was the little things which we might have done or left undone—the letting alone. We might have kept our Church ideas and likings more to ourselves, and let Gertrude follow as she learned to see the beauty of it all. We ought never to have nagged at her about attending service, nor about asking Wood to do what we considered wrong. He

could have settled those things. If we had lived out in our lives the beautiful Churchly teachings, Gertrude would have seen far more to admire and love than she ever did through all our preaching and self-righteous fault-finding."

She kept herself so prominently in it all, and it was all so thoroughly true, that no one could deny or object.

These conversations were simply reliefs to the over-burdened hearts in the household. They wrought out no plans for changing the state of things; none for the comfort or help of the almost heart-broken husband. He bore his pain silently and alone; night after night he would unfold that letter which Gertrude had left upon his desk, and read it over, until indeed the need for opening it no longer existed, for he knew it by heart. Still, mechanically he sat and looked at it, with bowed head and heavy eyes. No, there was no encouragement to seek her out; very distinctly, though affectionately, had she said he must not come to her, for she would not see him until he had made fair trial of her absence and perchance found that happiness again which she had taken from his life. "She had never intended to be so cruel. He must try to forgive her, if he could," and so on.

"Oh, my little wife! my poor darling!" he would cry, with his head bowed over the much-worn letter, and a longing in his heart which was like a physical pain.

How could he bear it? How much longer would it be? Would it ever end? Had it not been for these nights of relaxing, these hours when, all alone, he could give vent to his grief, he could not indeed have borne up as long as he did. The gray began to show upon his temples, and deep lines to mark his fine handsome face.

But no! though long ere this he had suspected just where she was living, he could not go to her; not yet. Had she any longing for him? he wondered. Ah, would she not cry out to him if her heart ached as did his? Would she not say that "Come!" which he would hear before the slow telegraph could bring it, and which he would make speed to answer? But she did not say it.

XXXI.

HAD he seen her, he would have known how deeply her heart was moved, what pain and grief she was suffering. Dr. Price saw it and he said to his wife, "You must go to the child, mother. She needs you now far more than she needs me; she will open her heart to one of her own sex; the poor girl has no mother!"

Gentle Mrs. Price—to whom God, in His wisdom, had denied the blessing of motherhood, perhaps, indeed, that she might have larger liberty to mother these needy ones in her husband's flock—hastened to obey the summons.

She found Mrs. Everson half sick, lying listlessly back in a great chair; a hot stove directly in front of her, yet she herself shivering and pale.

"I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Price; I was feeling dreadfully lonely and—sad!"

"Of course, dear child; it could not be otherwise. You are not in your right place, you know."

So gently spoken, with that kind touch of the soft old hand upon her bright hair! Gertrude thought of her own mother in Paradise. Was she glad that her child had one like this to comfort and guide her? Was it a voice from that blessed abode, from the mother who waited there, which bade her tell all her troubled story to this wise and gentle clergyman's wife?

Gertrude obeyed the voice. With bowed head and burning cheeks, she told it, and oh, what a relief it was that this motherly, experienced heart should know all her grief, that now at last she might hope for some word of counsel and hope, possibly even of good cheer. She was ready to hear herself condemned: willing to bear her own share of the censure, since she knew she had not been wholly free from wrong.

Mrs. Price took the small, cold hands in her soft, warm clasp.

"You are like a dear child to me," she said, in her pleasant way. "I don't want you to feel so lonely again. I am going to ask a favor of you. Will you come and stay with me the rest of the time you spend here? I have a bright little room, opening from my sewing room, where I so often wish for some one to be. Let me have you there for a while; and we shall have some long talks to-

gether, which will help to clear away the clouds, I am sure."

It seemed too good to be true—too good to come to one who had gone astray so. Gertrude accepted it very humbly, very gratefully; she felt as if she had known Mrs. Price all her life.

But while she was putting her things together, and Mrs. Price was explaining to the landlady, a sudden cloud came across the young wife's brightening landscape. This was a clergyman of the Church into whose family she was going! Would she have all those same troubles to encounter there? Would they expect her to keep all the fasts and to attend all the services, "just as if she were acquainted with all those saints?"

She shuddered as a remembrance came back to her of the old difficulties and misunderstandings and trials.

"Will they insist on my liking the Church, I wonder? If they do, I shall"—hate it! her wicked spirit suggested; but the better angel prevailed, and she added, with a sigh—"Well, I will try."

Everything was made quite right with the wondering Mr. Parsons and his wife, and an hour

later one of their queer rattling conveyances was carrying Gertrude's trunk to the rectory, while she and Mrs. Price walked leisurely on together, talking of nothing more serious than the growing spring-time, the early birds which flitted hopefully about on the bare branches, and the grass in the sheltered nooks, which was beginning to show traces of color.

Wise woman, Mrs. Price, who knew how to "bide her time," not allowing impatience or curiosity to mar the good work she was appointed to do!

The doctor was not at home, when the ladies arrived. When he returned, they were seated together, each with a bit of work, in the pretty parlor adjoining his study. His face lighted up, at the sight.

"Wise and wonderful woman, you have accomplished that which I most desired! Mrs. Everson, I am greatly pleased to welcome you to our quiet home!"

He took her hand with a cordial grasp which enforced the truth of his words.

"I thought you were not looking well, and I was wondering how we could make your stay at H—— more pleasant for you. I see that Mrs. Price has found the right thing. Mother, how should I

manage without your wise help to smooth my blundering ways ?"

His easy, informal talk made Gertrude feel quite comfortable. So she was established for the present as an inmate of Doctor Price's little home—as bright, as refined, as happy a home, as any one need wish to enter; for the peace of God dwelt there, and there His will was the rule and guide of each day. It was the best of all things which at that time could have been given to Gertrude Everson; it was the beginning of a new life and thought to her. She soon found that she need not fear any "insisting" nor any persuasion regarding the services or ways of the Church.

It was the early part of Lent; there were daily services—one or two—in St. John's Church, of which Doctor Price was the rector. Mrs. Price always went.

The first morning after Gertrude's arrival in her home, the clergyman's wife said to her, "My dear, this is your home for the present. I want you to feel and to do exactly as you would in your own home. I am not going to trouble you each day by asking you to come to Church with me; I want you to know, dear, that I shall be glad of your going whenever you wish to do so. Let there be no formality between us any more than between

mother and daughter. Do what you love to do, as I do. Is this a compact between you and me?" she ended, smiling and bending to kiss the girl's pale cheek.

"Yes, and thank you more than I can say, my dear friend."

It was all that Gertrude had power to utter just then; her heart was full and tears sprang to her eyes.

There were Prayer Books in every room at the rectory, and just at that season many an attractive looking little volume with readings and teachings for Lent. There they lay, and any one who chose might open and read; no one was urged to do so, and certainly no one was treated as unworthy because they did not so.

Gertrude felt as if she had entered into a sort of chamber of freedom; and yet, somehow, it was a chamber of peace, and an entrance-court to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes the clergyman and his wife would discuss a question brought forward by the season or the services; it was always pleasant and interesting to hear them.

Occasionally, though rarely since Gertrude's coming, Mrs. Price would say, "Roland, won't you read this little poem aloud to us, if Mrs. Ever-

son doesn't mind? I always get the meaning more clearly when you read."

And his reading of any poem was well worth listening to. Gertrude learned, soon, to take her own favorites to him, in his leisure moments, as well as to be glad when his wife took hers.

If it were the rector's "lectures" which first induced her to attend the services in which they were given, it was not very long before she began to care for all the services, even the short one of simple Evening Prayer at the sweet sunset hour. Her heart grew less bitter at these times; she did not realize what was helping her, what was changing her; she only knew that she felt a peace dawning through her great grief—a peace that was like the glimmer of a far-off possible sunlight. Her heart still ached and longed—oh, how sadly!—for her husband; none could tell how great the longing was; yet what should she do? She could not yet feel herself ready to go back to the old life, the old way of trouble and misunderstanding. She almost wished that she had not so sternly forbidden Elwood to seek her out. Could she bear this separation longer, and how was he bearing it?

She had spoken freely with Mrs. Price, and received much comforting and wise counsel from that

good lady; yet the clergyman's wife was sorely perplexed to know all that she ought to say to this young creature, whose path had so early found the thorns and dark windings.

"Perhaps the Lord has sent her here to us that we may teach her the value of His Church. We are outsiders; not like those of her husband's family, who have a personal interest in the matter; she will more readily take and learn from us, if we ask for wisdom to speak and act in the best way. I cannot see any other duty clear before us. She herself knows best how she needs her husband; she evidently pines for him hourly; none can see her and not realize that. Let us just take the present plain duty, and employ this opportunity which seems to be given us, but we must be wise and careful, mother; I need not say this to you!"

"Yes, Roland; I see plainly that Mrs. Everson must be led gently," not driven—not even persuaded; she has been urged too much; things have become distasteful to her for that reason. It seems to me an error which devout and devoted Church people are too apt to commit."

Thus they talked and planned together, these two who desired to do the Master's will and into whose hands God had committed so great a charge.

For Mrs. Everson, she never realized that those good friends had any strong desire to bring her to love the Church; she saw in all their actions and words only a generous and friendly sympathy, a Christian kindness which was exceedingly pleasant to her at this dark hour of her suffering and loneliness.

In her daily letters to Sylvie she gave accounts of their goodness to her and of her quiet life with them which set her sister's loving and anxious heart at rest. Stewart also expressed himself as greatly relieved at knowing that Trudie was away from "that dismal little hotel."

"She'll be all right now," he said, with such an air of confidence and cheerfulness that his wife took courage from it, and felt happier than she had since Gertrude went away.

At first Gertrude had written, in the bitterness of her spirit, "There is no one here to torment me or to preach at me, about 'the Church'—'the Church!' If I so choose, I may go to that same Church, and sing and pray and listen to a sermon, and not be marked as a heretic when I come out because I don't believe in a Saint Jacobus, or Saint Somebody else, whose 'day' comes in the middle of the next week. Nobody teases me to study the Prayer Book, nor to 'fast' from innocent

pastimes, nor to fasten my belief to 'Apostolic orders!' No, I am a free woman; I can live my own life, and breathe my own air of heaven, though I do not know the 'Fathers of the Church,' and all they wrote and said."

Then gradually this contemptuous tone died out, and a simple sadness breathed through all her letters—no sarcasms, no biting references nor comparisons, no angry spirit. How the good Sylvie rejoiced at that! And now the best of all had come, as her letters, so changed in tone, bore witness; for she was living in close companionship with the pure and good, who also loved her and understood what her best interests were.

Stewart and Sylvie Yates spoke together often, and with serious consideration, in regard to showing—or offering to show—Gertrude's letters to her husband; it was a question difficult to decide; in the first place, they scarcely ever saw Mr. Everson; he never came to either of them after that first and only call at Stewart's office; if they casually met him, either alone or in company with his mother or sisters, he never asked any questions; he bore his pain alone, and in a dignified silence that asked for neither pity or sympathy.

Rica was the only one of the sisters who ever

went to Sylvie's house. She was Gertrude's steadfast friend still, and mourned truly with the only sister. She read Gertrude's letters with eagerness; but did not counsel Sylvie to offer them to Elwood; she told them how her brother was living away from them, in his sorrow, asking for no sympathy, for no comfort or companionship; he never mentioned his wife's name, but the grief was wearing upon him, sadly, surely. Yes, they too could see that in the few casual meetings they had with him. It was very hard!

"Yet what can I do? Oh, what can I do?" Sylvie exclaimed, again and again. "If only some other home, some other way of living could be adopted! I would gladly ask them to make their home here with us, if it would be of any use to do so."

"Certainly; so would I; but what would be the gain of that? Everson is perfectly able to maintain Trude in a comfortable home; and perhaps he would have a separate home, if she came back to him; there is no real need of his living on there; his mother doesn't need him!"

"No; I think when they were married Trudie rather liked the arrangement; she had been like one of them for so long; but it was a mistake."

"Poor little Trudie! I wish she would write to

him, and see if things couldn't be straightened out."

But Gertrude had yet this page of her life-lesson to learn ; and the time was not yet come for the kind offices of these good friends.

XXXII.

MRS. EVERSON had passed a strange day, the only day of any real incident to her since her going to H——. She had gone out for an early walk in the fresh spring air ; the morning actually had a touch of spring softness and beauty.

It was time ; March was nearing its end, the long, tedious month which oft-times wearies the heart with its grasp of wintry chill and barrenness; the dull fetters were beginning to yield at last beneath the brightening rays of the sun ; the birds had found it out long before, but human hearts are apt to be more faithless than robins and blue-birds. We need a bit of sight to help our feeble faith—a spear or two of tender green; a tiny young leaf, no matter how far down, or hidden among the dead brown ones—something for a visible, tangible token, and then we are glad."

Could this young wife be glad, as she wandered on, seeing here and there a sign, and hearing the

voices of the busy robins? Alas, no; what to her now were all the beauties of a season in which she once had delight?

What were they doing and saying, those merry, busy robins? Building nests, and calling mate to mate! Happy creatures! "Ah! did not one call to me once, in the glad new spring-time a year ago—only one little year! Did he not call with the tender voice of love? and was I not glad to answer, and to go to the home nest with him? Ah me, could it all have been a mistake? I spoiled his life; I could not make him happy? I was the wrong one, they said!"

She mused on in this way, walking along the hedges where the twittering birds took courage from her gentle movements, and did not interrupt their labors. The sun fell brightly upon her pale face, but did not warm it into any color.

Presently, as she passed out from the fields into the narrow foot-path by the road-side, a quick, firm step startled her, and some one else, enjoying a morning walk drew near. Gertrude did not look up, but was passing quietly on her way, when a familiar voice spoke, astonished.

"Can it be possible—Mrs. Everson? Fair greeting to you this bright morning."

George Græme held out his hand, and she

placed hers in it with a joyful feeling, as if she were touching a link in that dear, happy past whose golden chain had dropped from her hold. She could only smile at first, a very trembling little smile, too, as if the tears lay not far back. She could say nothing to this man, who had come up to her from that far land of sunshine where her treasures were. He did the talking at first, rattling on like one perfectly willing to cover all such deficiency on her part, blundering and halting, making new beginnings, and leaving half-finished sentences.

"I knew that—that—you had gone—that you were away from home, Mrs. Everson; but I did not dream of meeting you here. How long have—I beg pardon! How are you? You do not look very robust."

"Oh pretty well, thank you?" she faltered.

"If I had only known I should meet you, I—' He had to begin again. "I came up to H—— on business; a tedious law case, which has been tormenting me for a long time. By the way, how sad that was about poor De Lancey! I was away when it came out. I had been acting as his lawyer for a time, but the poor fellow's affairs were in a terrible condition."

"What a shame, for a man with a wife and little

ones, and certainly he had a fair business; had he not?"

Young Græme looked at her, wonderingly. She had not been used to speaking so about her friends—about any one, in fact. Had she grown less generous and forgiving in her thoughts of people? Her face had a look upon it which he had never seen there before. She felt his kind, searching glance, and blushed beneath it.

For George Græme, his heart grew tender, recalling the long past days; days when he had kept very precious thoughts of this girl within the most sacred recesses of his being; and now he was wondering if he could not have made her more completely happy.

"Yes, De Lancey's business was very fair, if he had let speculation alone. That was his temptation, poor fellow!"

"I am afraid I do not pity him as you men do. Why cannot a man be a man, and resist temptation when he has everything to help him and to make his life beautiful!"

"Ah, Mrs. Everson, it is so easy to yield—to fall! We think we are strong, we feel proudly sure of it; then the hour of temptation comes, we fall, and only then begin to realize our weakness."

He spoke so sadly, that she looked at him with amazement.

"Why, Mr. Græme, you speak as if you knew about these things; I did not suppose that temptations ever troubled you!"

"Yes," he replied slowly, drawing a long breath, and looking upward at the clear morning sky, "yes, Mrs. Everson, I am sorely tempted to do wrong sometimes. Life is a battle, all the way through, but we will hope, through grace, to gain the victory," he added, in his old, clear, ringing voice.

She did not know how "sorely tempted" he was just there and then! It was so pleasant to linger along in the fair spring morning with this old friend; to look into her sweet face again—just they two speaking together, with none to interfere! So pleasant, and it brought back those old tender thoughts and hopes. Ah, that was the danger, and he knew it. Nay, he would not give that temptation another moment's room to grow.

With this resolve he stopped, saying frankly, "It is very pleasant walking on so with you this bright morning, but I must get back to my work. Good-bye, Mrs. Everson; I am glad to have seen you. Can I do anything for you in the city?"

She hesitated, blushing painfully.

"Yes, Mr. Græme; you can do me a favor if you will; for reasons best known only to myself, I have chosen to keep my present abiding-place a secret. If you will, you can aid me in this matter."

"It shall be, Mrs. Everson, as though I had never visited H——," he said in his manly, earnest way, and he meant even more than she knew.

Gertrude turned toward the rectory, her face full of a deep feeling which had been stirred by this very unexpected meeting.

As she drew near the house, the church bell began to ring. On entering she found Mrs. Price returning from the kitchen, where she had been giving her orders, and fulfilling certain small daily duties.

"Why, Mrs. Price, what does the church bell mean? I thought you were just about through the Morning Service."

"Oh, do you not remember? The hour was changed for this morning. To-day is the Feast of the Annunciation; and we have full Morning Service at eleven o'clock, instead of our usual Daily Prayers."

A sudden wave of recollection swept over Gertrude at the name of this Church festival. She had never forgotten it! It was so linked with all sweet and pleasant memories! How well she

could recall every word which Rica had said on that very feast day one year ago. She remembered Rica liked the old style of beginning the year upon that day; she remembered her speaking of Gabriel's message to the Virgin. Ah yes, she had carried that thought with her, for long afterward—"the power of the Highest overshadowing." It had seemed so good and pleasant to her then, in that new joy which was just beginning to color her whole life; had seemed so to sanctify it and to make it greater and worthier. It was "specially the woman's day" Rica had told her, quoting from Dr. Dorman; a day which all women, young or old could appreciate, kneeling with all the unsolved, vexing problems of their lives there at the Virgin's side, praying with her that the power of the Highest might overshadow them. Yes, the very words, clear and distinct, as if re-uttered to her, came back—"The things that are too hard for thee; the things that are above thy strength."

These words of that evening lesson from the Apocrypha, so strangely fitting in with the story of the lowly Virgin wondering "how these things could be," and bowing to accept humbly whatsoever was sent to her in that power of the Highest.

Oh, how beautiful it all was, and how full of

help for all women surely—"And only one year ago—one little year."

It all passed in a few minutes, while she stood there with that strange light and shadow alternating upon her young face and her hands tightly clasped. Mrs. Price saw it, wondering.

At length Gertrude spoke and her voice had a mournful sweetness which touched the elder lady's heart.

"I think I would like to go to church with you this morning, Mrs. Price, if you will let me."

"Let you, my dear? Why I shall be very glad!"

"I will not keep you waiting; I shall be down in one minute."

She came with her own little Prayer Book in her hand, and a flickering color in her cheeks. Mrs. Price noticed the Prayer Book, for she had a pretty Prayer Book and Hymnal of her own ready for Gertrude. She laid this quietly aside, saying nothing, but feeling a deep thankfulness in her heart. Verily this thing had been "too hard" for her, had not the loving Father Himself undertaken where she had faltered and fainted.

They went out into the fair spring sunlight together, the two women whose youth and age each

so needed that overshadowing Power—one whose whole life had been guided and blessed by it; one whose early path had brought thorns and stumbling-places, where she was standing with outstretched hands, only just now realizing how her strength lay in that Almighty Power.

The birds sang, and seemed to sing with the voices of that glad day only a year ago; the sweet air, soft with the promise of the near April, breathed about the two women, and seemed to Gertrude to whisper glad refrains of that happy day only a year ago; the Church bells rang, and seemed to tell of that perfect unity of heart which had made all life and all holy things good and true to her, only a year ago!

They did not speak much to each other, as they walked the short way between the rectory and the church; their hearts were full, their thoughts were busy—speech was not needed.

They were early, and the hush of the sanctuary was very pleasant to Gertrude. Never before in her whole life had she so forgotten herself and all her surroundings in silent prayer. It was as if she knelt in the immediate presence of the kingly Father, under the overshadowing of His detaining hand. Her Amen was merged into the first low, trembling tones of the organ voluntary which it-

self was a "We beseech Thee" for those who could appreciate it; and Gertrude could.

It was a feast day, yet the shadow of the holy fast subdued and chastened its joy.

Doctor Price saw Gertrude by the side of his wife; he saw, too, the joy in his wife's face. He did not speak the less warmly and earnestly for these two things.

Gertrude listened to the story of the day with an awed and wondering spirit. This was the story of the mystery of the incarnation—a simple, tender, touching story, the beginning of the world's redemption!

Well-fitting was it indeed that all people should celebrate this day. She looked back, and in her heart thanked Rica for first telling her of it. Now she knew and realized for herself. Was it but the beginning of her full knowledge and realization? Yes, though she knew it not at the time. Who of us ever knows the time of God's beginnings of good toward us?

The words of the Collect lingered long in Gertrude's mind; they gave her a strange realizing sense of how our lives must each follow on after the pattern of our Great Exemplar. Had she not told herself that life was only made up of "the cross and the grave"? and here the Collect said,

"By His cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of His resurrection." Ah, that was the true, glad explanation, after all. It is the cross; but His cross; and oh, what a difference that makes! Our Lord's own sanctified cross, lightened and consecrated by His passion for us! And if we bear it rightly—ah, but she was not bearing hers so!

Then it was not so much the cross and the grave to think of as the cross and "the glory of His resurrection."

Gertrude had been a nominal Christian for some years, but she had never so fully sat in the blessed light of redemption's story as on that day when she first prayed the words of this Collect, following the rector's voice, and realized how only "by His cross and passion, we may be brought unto the glory of His resurrection!"

XXXIII.

THEY talked long together that evening, Mrs. Everson and her two faithful friends, after the rector's work was ended.

She told them of her meeting with her old friend George Græme, that morning ; it had not occurred to her to speak of it before ; she had not been so moved in her heart by the encounter as poor young Græme had ; it had simply stirred the memories of those other things which were life itself to her. Where he had come from, and those whom he and she knew—thoughts of these stirred her far more than just George Græme's presence or anything which in the past he might have been to her.

After leaving him that morning, such greater and more important things had come to her that she had almost forgotten the meeting. In the evening she spoke pleasantly of it, casually wondering what "law case" it was which had brought Mr. Græme to H——; but she cared far more to

speak of other things even then. Her heart was full of a newly-kindled light. She felt a desire to know more ; she had never had any such strong, lasting feeling before, unless perhaps during those days of her first visit to H—— with Elwood. She recalled her thoughts of that time, and especially of the Sunday which they had spent there, but her heart had been so full of its own sweet joy then that she had not given fair place to all the questioning. At home, again, all desire for knowledge had been burned out of her, by the too fiery zeal of her sisters-in-law. Now, in this still, peaceful refuge whither she had flown with her burden of grief and shame and disappointment, she felt an intense longing to learn more of the Church which was so dear a part of her husband's life. If, as his mother had said, he should have married "in the Church," then she would like to see what such a thing would have been! The feeling, the wish, was so new, so recently born within her, that she scarcely understood it herself ; she was half awed by it.

Starting from such a holy day—a day so full of wondrous revelation and inspiration, of lookings back and lookings forward—the desire must naturally have something of tender sentiment in it, but if it were responded to and guided to its end by Doctor Price and his wife all would be well.

"If she only stays, if the Lord only lets her stay with us a little longer," said the doctor, hopefully, when the evening's talk was over.

"I think, Roland, the Lord, having sent her to us, will not interrupt His own work; though to be sure it might be His will to let some one else finish it," she added a little sadly.

"Paul, or Apollos, no matter, mother, only so the work is done," said the clergyman; adding, however, for human comfort, "but I believe Mrs. Everson will stay here for a time yet; for one thing, it would be quite detrimental to her health, if she returned to the city now, in the spring-time, the most trying season of all the year, just when any one needs the help of country breezes; and this girl looks to me very frail. I declare, I have half a mind to write to Everson!"

"Oh no, my dear Roland; never, unless she bids you do so!"

He smiled at his wife's half-frightened exclamation.

"No, I suppose that will not do. Well, mother, let us continue our work, with good hope; and God will give the increase and take care of everything else."

Palm Sunday and Holy Week were the solemn

occasions which next claimed Gertrude Everson's newly-aroused interest.

"Surely," she exclaimed, "I never saw or heard aright before, or how could I have turned from any such things as these?"

"Perhaps the ground had to be prepared for the seed, my child," said the old rector kindly, for he had come to regard Gertrude as a veritable child—as young in knowledge of the world as she was in years of life, and certainly a mere child in her understanding of the Church!

He felt a surprise, a grieved surprise, as he discovered how little Elwood Everson had done to help and increase this understanding. Well as he knew the man, he did not know aught of that wonderfully tender restraint which his love had put upon all things, that this young wife might not be persuaded or urged by anything save by the inclination of her affections. The man's strong love had blinded him; he could not see clearly and undazzled, as could Doctor Price, looking calmly from his wise stand-point. If Gertrude had ever gone to her husband with one of the eager questions which she was now daily putting to the old clergyman, how eloquent would he have become in his joy of explanation. She had a few times said to him, "I do begin to love your Church," or had

showed him how she felt the beauty of certain parts of the liturgy. But those things had been mere passing hopes, as fleeting as the sunshine of April. He had never received anything enduring or deep or thorough, in this matter, from the wife who stood, in other ways, so near to him. If he, in his love alone, would not persuade her, how much less did he find it right to do so when he discovered how persistent, how over-anxious were his sisters in their discussion of these things!

Both Doctor Price and his wife had noticed the bitterness of spirit which Mrs. Everson entertained toward her husband's sisters, and they had experience enough in their long service for the Master to understand the trouble, and to pause wisely to consider before venturing upon any effort towards remedying these things.

"It is an easier work, because there is nothing complex about it. We have only to teach Mrs. Everson the completeness, the all-sufficiency of the Church, and her love for it, which follows, will make right all that remains."

"And perhaps we shall not have even that to do, for since Mrs. Everson has begun to attend the services, the Church will teach its own lessons to her in a great measure. Don't you think so, Roland?"

"Yes, mother; your thought, as usual, goes a step beyond mine."

If it did so, he was always glad to yield the palm to this faithful help-meet, whose clear quick insight had done so much for him through the varying years of labor.

"'Perhaps the ground had to be prepared for the seed'! The ground? That was her own stubborn, proud heart, which had refused to accept the good, because it had been in some fashion thrust upon her." Ah, even then, as she began to see it all, the old impulse of indignant sarcasm came back to her.

"One doesn't care to be rudely pushed into the sunlight even," she said to herself, as she pondered the old rector's words; but the growing glory soon over-swept all low clouds that hung lowering from the past."

More especially did the peace which passeth understanding begin to show itself unto her in that Holy Week—that wonderful, deeply-solemn week, wherein each day repeated that same story, in the words of the different evangelists, that one incomparable story of Him who, "being in the form of God," "took upon Himself the form of a servant and the very likeness of man."

It was not a new story to her; she had been a

Christian too long for that; but had any such daily following of the Redeemer, in the last completing week of his sacrificial life, ever before brought her so close to His divine humanity? Had He ever before been a Christ so near at hand, whose taking upon Him of the likeness of men made her troubles and pains His own, to bear with her?

She never could tell, in all her life afterwards, of just what nature the household life had been at the rectory during that Holy Week; whether they had fasted specially, or omitted any of the ordinary ways and duties; she could not remember that there had been any talk about it, at all events. She had gone on, with the world's Redeemer, so closely during these days that all other life seemed shut out, and dim to recall afterwards. She had not even realized how she was being led; that it was Christ's Hand, through His Church, which held hers, and guided her along that consecrated way!

She did not come to herself, as it were, until all was over, until it was "finished," and the awful silence fell upon the sealed tomb. Presently, then, she seemed to find herself waiting there at the holy sepulchre, with the other women; and lo! when the dawn-light came, "the stone was rolled away," and Gertrude Everson stood ready to sing,

with the Holy Church throughout all the world, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

She had gone to her little friends in the "mill village," before the last service of that Easter Even.

"Would they go with her? Yes, indeed; they knew exactly where."

Gaining ready permission from proud mothers who loved the "young master's lady," they went hurrying back to where they had left her waiting, so pale and still, each one carrying his pail or little basket.

It was not a noisy party; yet the children were happy; and, oh, the fragrance of the abundant arbutus which peeped up at them from under the brown, dead leaves of the long winter, telling its own perfect story of the resurrection-time. The little ones softly hummed their Easter carols, casting curious, shy glances up at the beautiful, quiet lady, but she did not hear them, to understand. She was waiting yet, with Mary.

They carried their great perfumed offering to the Church, and massed it carefully in the font, to be arranged later.

"Who brought this?" asked the rector, in a low pleased voice, as he stood, after the last Easter Even service, with a few faithful ones

who were to "decorate" the sanctuary for the risen Lord.

No one knew, until one little choir boy, half asleep, waiting for some one to take him home, looked up to say, "We all went with the master's lady up on the hills this afternoon to get it. She asked us to go with her, and we brought it here."

Mrs. Everson waited alone in the rector's pew, with her Prayer Book open in her hands, and her head bent over it. Doctor Price went and sat by her. She glanced up, as he spoke, with that strange, expectant look upon her face, and he almost hesitated to break that waiting silence.

"The arbutus, Mrs. Everson! It is so very beautiful and appropriate—that which I prize beyond any hothouse rarity; I thank you for your thoughtfulness."

"It is only my little offering," she said simply, and he went away to the others, and left her there —waiting.

XXXIV.

AFTER that early service on Easter morning, the world began to appear a different place to Gertrude Everson.

She had surprised the rector and his wife by meeting them, as they came out of their room, in the still dawn-light.

"May I go," she asked the clergyman in a low voice, while his wife stepped to the dining-room to speak to the servant, "to the Holy Communion? I believe I am really 'in love and charity' with all the world!"

The quick tears started as she spoke.

"Yes, my child, yes; and I am very glad. We will go and meet out risen Lord together."

They went, without a word, after their Easter greeting of one another, the three together, on through that sweet, fresh, Easter dawn, with carolling birds on every side, and only the Church bell to mingle its call with their notes of praise.

As she knelt for the first time since her coming

to H——, to partake of those "holy mysteries," in remembrance of a Saviour's deathless love, the one earthly thought, too much a part of herself to be shut out, was the longing for her husband to kneel by her side, but the heavenly love was so great that all lesser loves soon sank from thought beneath its power.

So that Easter Day began, and the new understanding which for Gertrude Everson dawned with it seemed like a bow of promise, encircling her whole life, its pure white resolved into many fair colors to gladden and illumine her days; and then, while this young wife was carefully and seriously searching her inmost heart, to find if indeed all was there so pure, so peaceable, and of such good intent that she could go back to the old home and fear no trouble, there were set, suddenly, limits to her plans by a Father's wise decree.

She was far from well, that was quite evident to the good rector and his wife, but she seemed cheerful and hopeful, and when they spoke of her want of appetite and her paleness, she made answer, "I will go about more now, and get such an appetite that it will astonish you; I have walked scarcely any since coming here, but my ramble with the children on Easter Even has aroused my old love of such things."

The weather was growing very delightful, and Gertrude promised herself to begin her "health walks" the very next day. They must be short, at first, she acknowledged to herself, for she felt weak and trembling. The yearning for her husband had come upon her with terrible intensity during the last few days, and she began to say to herself, "It must be soon; I want him so!"

Then she wondered if his love had turned from her, if he were indeed content and "happier" without her, and the thought was dreadful to her.

That evening, when Doctor Price went home, after a visit to the "mill village," his face wore a look of anxiety. His wife noticed it instantly, and going toward him, she said, "What is it, Roland? Is any one ill, or dying, or—" she stopped abruptly, at a warning look from his eyes.

Gertrude, who sat reading near the window, sprang up at the abrupt pause, her face perfectly colorless and gasped, "Is it—my—husband?"

"No, dear child, no," reiterated the old clergyman, putting his arm about her, and seating her in an arm-chair, for she was almost fainting.

Then he knew that anything which he had to tell would be better for her to hear than leaving her to imagine worse evils.

"Now," he said, with an attempt at gayety, "if you two ladies will please not to get excited or alarmed, or any of those unnecessary things, I will tell you the simple truth. Nothing alarming, I assure you! It is only a little trouble at the mills."

"Oh!" broke in the young wife of the mill-owner; then, with a strong effort, she controlled herself, and said no more, listening, however, with bated breath.

"Hopson had secured a new hand, it seems, some time ago—one whom he thought a good workman, but it seems that the fellow had got into trouble at his last place—I forget where—and was involved with his master, who had failed. After the lawyer had been here to see him (your friend Mr. Græme, by the way, Mrs. Everson) and he had been away giving his evidence in the case, he became so unmanageable that Hopson grew vexed and puzzled. The fellow had urged Hopson to take in two or three other new hands at a specially busy time, and now when he was reproved for his behavior, he grew sulky and made these new hands troublesome too. The thing has been brewing, and growing worse for a week or so back; and now, suddenly, threats are freely uttered which make it seem a pretty serious mat-

ter; but we will hope it will all blow over. There has never been trouble at the mills, and Hopson is a cool-headed, sensible, trusty man."

Gertrude could scarcely wait until he had finished his last word; her eyes were like stars on a frosty night, her cheeks were a vivid red, and her lips trembled so that she could scarcely utter the words, "Has he sent for my husband?"

"It was a plain question, and there was no evading it without making matters worse.

"I believe that Hopson has done so, or intends to," he replied quietly, as if there were nothing in the fact to cause anxiety.

"Let us have a cup of tea now, and then we can talk it over more calmly. You are tired, Roland; I saw that, as soon as you came in, which made me speak so quickly."

She rang the bell, and the hot tea was brought in.

Gertrude had a faint turn when she arose to go to the table; so Mrs. Price made her lie back in the great chair, and brought her a cup of tea with her own hands. She was grateful and tried to swallow it. She looked up, with those glittering tearless eyes, and tried to frame a question.

"What is it, dear?" asked the gentle motherly voice.

"Ask the doctor if—that man—Aleck Jones is —is—with the wrong side."

The doctor, heard the question, and went to her to reply.

"Never fear for Jones, dear Mrs. Everson! He is a right loyal fellow, and loves—well, you, at any rate," with a cheery smile. "Oh no, Jones is all right; I never knew a man more changed than he in a few months."

As they sat down again, a slight noise was heard outside, then a heavy footstep, and a ring at the door-bell

Gertrude trembled visibly, but the others, putting strong control upon themselves, sat still and continued their meal. Presently the servant entered, and called the doctor.

He had scarcely begun to speak, outside the door, when the other voice, answering him hastily fell upon Gertrude s quick ear. She started to her feet, and went to the door.

"Aleck! Aleck Jones!" she cried, calling the man by his familiar name in her agitation, "take care of my husband! Do not let them harm him, will you?"

The big, awkward man made a step towards her, hat in hand, and with a rough voice full of emotion answered:

"As sure as there is a God who heard the prayer you said by my sick bed one day, so sure will I stand by your husband ma'am, and defend him with my last breath. He shall not come to harm while I live."

He bent his great shaggy head, and touched her hand with his lips.

But the effort had been too great for her over-strained nerves; she staggered forward, and Aleck Jones, catching her in his strong, steady arms, bore her—following Mrs. Price—to her room, and placed her gently upon the bed. Blessed unconsciousness came upon her, and lingered during the following days of storm and danger.

And so it came to pass that Elwood Everson did receive a telegram, which said to him "Come," but it was not his wife's "come."

Through all the strange, sudden journey, while the train rushed rapidly on, bearing him to the scene of disorder and rebellion, his thoughts dwelt persistently on the one idea which he had conceived—that his wife was there at H——, and that he was going to her. It was his own conceit; no one had hinted at such a thing; no word, no line of writing, had come from any interested or curious person to tell him the truth.

As he drew near the end of his journey, he

roused himself with an effort to fix his mind upon that trouble of which he had been warned, and which possibly meant danger, loss, injury to property and to his business.

Doctor Price was at the little depot, with his own horse and carriage, to meet Everson.

"Hopson could not leave, and he needs all his force," he began to explain to the mill-owner.

Strangely enough, his friend did not make any reply to the information, but turned an eager, worn face to his, and asked, in low tones of suppressed feeling, "Doctor, is my wife here in this place?"

Again was this simple truthful man compelled to make answer according to his wisdom, direct and plain.

"Yes, Everson, your wife is at my house, ill, but well taken care of. Mrs. Price and Doctor Gregory are with her; one all the time, and the other—well, more often than is at all necessary; but he has a very kind feeling towards Mrs. Everson as indeed we all have."

He saw the working of the strong features, the quivering lips, which had no power to frame another question, and he went on, in his quiet sympathetic way, making all clear to the listener at his side.

"She was somewhat 'run down,' and the spring weather, you know, and then this leaked out; we could not keep it from her; and she just gave up, and Gregory has her in his care. As gentle as a father is Gregory; so don't worry a particle, Everson, but trust your wife to God's gracious care, and put your mind upon this bad business at the mill."

In truth, he was compelled to do so, all day and all through that night.

It was a small force, led by the strange workman, who had only left one trouble to enter there and instigate another; but the small force was very persistent and very furious in its demands.

Upon the other side, consisting chiefly of Hopson and the old mill hands, there was only one who acted with any fierceness, and, strange to say, that one was Aleck Jones.

When the "young master" arrived, Aleck placed himself, like a towering wall, by his side, and there he stayed through the whole time of tumult.

They would not listen to Mr. Everson's words; they would not indeed allow his voice to be heard. His first appearance at the mill was a signal for angry and derisive shouts, and still more unreasonable demands; but for the presence of the clergyman with him, the mill-owner would have stood in

great danger. The outrageous absurdity of the thing was shown by the fact that not one of the new hands who were creating the disturbance had ever before even seen the master against whom their unwarranted complaints were made. They were gathered on one side of the principal mill, near the road by which the men came to their work, and no man had been allowed to enter the mill for work during the past day nor the present one. Aleck Jones would have forced his way through them, had not the foreman urged him not to do so, until they had heard from Mr. Everson. It was the hardest thing the strong, impulsive man had ever been compelled to do, to stand still there when he appreciated the right and wrong clearly, and longed to put the argument of two forcible arms and a bold spirit against those who had stirred up this strife. He had, however, good work to do, work which told more effectually in the end.

The mill-owner at last grew impatient at the delay and loss of time; he said to Mr. Hopson, who sat inside the mill with him, "I want to see and speak to that man. What is his name?"

"Brett, sir; but I do wish, Mr. Everson, you would think, and be cautious; he's the worst man I ever saw, and he is in liquor most of the time

now, though he's a good workman. Excuse me, sir, but I would not trust him."

"But we must get this thing settled, Hopson. I'll risk it; send for the man immediately."

A lad who was occasionally employed about the mills was sent to inform Brett that the master wished to see him. While he was gone, Mr. Hopson said in a very doleful tone, "It is all my fault; I never ought to have hired that man, at all; but the work was getting beyond us, and they told me he—"

"See here, Hopson," broke in Mr. Everson, who could scarcely repress a smile at his foreman's lugubrious face and manner, "it is not your fault —not at all, in any way! It is my fault. Did I not send you word to take the fellow simply because I was troubled with other matters, and did not care to attend to this myself. Now, whatever comes of this thing, Hopson, I want you to know, and all the others to know—Doctor Price here will tell them—that I consider you to have done perfectly right in all respects, and have not the slightest fault to find with you."

It was pleasant to see the man's face light up as Mr. Everson held out his hand and looked as cordial as his words sounded. It was a moment which Superintendent Hopson never forgot.

The man Brett did not delay his coming.

A derisive shout was heard as the messenger delivered his word, and then the leader stepped forward, turning to harangue his followers for a moment before leaving them. He drew a pistol from his pocket and showed it to them, with a meaning nod of his head.

Aleck Jones, who was everywhere, and almost at the same time, saw that action, and when Brett stood before the master in the mill, Aleck was behind a partition whence he could spring as he saw occasion.

"Your name is Brett, I believe. Will you come into my office? I wish to speak with you."

"The master" indeed spoke in each cool, fearless word, though Doctor Price and one or two other friends who stood near thought he was too bold and not cautious enough.

"Thank God that his young wife cannot know anything of it," the good old clergyman exclaimed to himself.

The conference was neither loud nor long, and only Aleck Jones ever knew the full purport of it. He never repeated a word of all that he overheard, as he stood concealed for his master's defense. All that any one heard was this, spoken in low firm tones by Mr. Everson as he opened the door for

Brett to pass out—"I give you to-night in which to make up your minds; if you are here in the morning, a dispatch shall bring the officers from the town," spoken as calmly as one might make a business arrangement with a friend; and the man, with his fingers on the pistol, and an angry glare in his eyes, passed by the little group of friends, paused an instant, as if considering, and strode on toward his companions, or rather his tools, for he was far superior to them in mental capacity.

"Now, my men," the master stepped to the mill door, and beckoned to his old hands, who stood in a body, waiting and wondering, "come in here, I want you."

Not with any shouting—they understood their master too well for that—but with quiet order, they filed in. A few stray missiles from the other side fell among them, a few drops of blood were spilled, nothing much—a murmur, as of angry waves, came up from Brett's party, and then the great doors swung to and the bolts were drawn.

"Can you hold the fort for a while, my men?"

Glad words of assent came from eager and grateful men.

"Then stay here under—let me see—"

"Jones!" "Jones, sir!" they cried with one

consent, and Aleck Jones' proud heart beat fast as he stood with bent head at the master's side.

"Yes, I agree with you," Everson assented, placing one hand kindly upon Jones' broad shoulder. "Stay here, then, under Aleck Jones, while Mr. Hopson and I go with Doctor Price, and get him to give us some supper; and—let me think—the men must have something to eat. Could we venture to send—"

But he was interrupted by many voices calling out that they wanted nothing to eat, were not hungry, etc., etc.

"Well then, if you can wait until I come back, or Mr. Hopson, you shall have something; and Ned here," indicating the lad who had carried the message to Brett, "shall come with us, and let your wives know how the matter stands."

"Three cheers for the master!" were irrepressible at that, and were given with a wonderful heartiness.

"It's just like the master," they said, one to another; "he always thinks of everything, even the wives and little ones!"

And it was very true; in that fact lay his power over the men

"If anything occurs, if Brett attempts any violence—and above all things, my men, look out for

fire—ring the mill bell, and you will soon have help."

They promised all care and caution, and the two gentlemen, with Hopson and "Ned," went out by a side door, which was carefully secured after them.

Hopson, however, said he should go to his own home, and set his wife's heart at rest. Then, he could soon return to the mill. He and Ned, therefore, started together for the "mill village."

XXXV.

THE instant they had left the mill and were going toward the rectory, Mr. Everson seemed to drop the subject of the business trouble entirely from his mind, and to be far more deeply concerned with something else.

"Doctor, will she want to see me? Does she know of my coming?"

The brave old clergyman—he had yet another hard thing to do; but he did not hesitate nor blunder over it, though he was so very weary with his unusual day's work.

"No, Everson; your wife does not know of your coming; at least she does not realize that, nor anything now; she has not been in her right mind since early last night."

The husband leaned back in the carriage with a groan.

"It is a low fever, Gregory says; and has been hanging about her for some days. We tried to

keep the news of this mill trouble from her, but she found it out, and the first thing she asked was if they had sent for you. Last night just after they sent your dispatch, Jones came to my house; she heard his voice, and ran out, all excitement, to beseech him to take care of you; and, Everson, I wish you had heard him—" the old clergyman had to pause for a moment, to clear his voice, and then he told what Aleck Jones had said to the lady who had prayed by the side of his sick bed.

"And her strength suddenly seemed to give way then, Everson. She had fainted, just while Jones was speaking, and he took her up like a child and carried her to her bed."

"Is she very ill? Is there danger? My friend, tell me the truth! What does Gregory say?"

There was no calmness or quiet absence of fear in his manner then; the husband was a different man from the owner of the mills.

"Your wife is very ill, my dear friend; I will speak plainly; but Doctor Gregory says that her youth and her excellent constitution are greatly in her favor; and he has fair hope of bringing her safely through this attack."

They entered the house quietly; Doctor Gregory had been away to his other patients, and was now planning to spend the night with Mrs. Everson.

He did not speak many words, but his grasp of the husband's hand, said much.

"It will not harm her for me to go in?" asked Elwood.

"No, I think not. She will not know you."

He went up with the physician. Mrs. Price met them, and left them at the door. She was going to see that the bountiful, warm supper was ready to be served at a minute's notice.

Doctor Gregory stood an instant and then said, "I am just going to the next room, to finish some preparations for the night; call, if you want me."

So the husband was left alone by the bedside of his wife. He knelt down, bringing his face quite close to hers, but he could not fix her gaze; she moved her head restlessly from side to side, and her low mutterings showed how her mind was wandering.

"Rica," she said, "Rica, it isn't true! I do love him! Ha, ha! not Malcolm! What made the trouble? George Græme came here—here—to H——. Funny, wasn't it?"

Then a pause while he ventured to reach for her hand; its touch was like fire, and yet she shivered and her feverish raving began again.

"Yes, the very same day, a year ago—the Feast—the Feast of—sh! Doctor Price told me. I shall

be—confirmed; don't tell Elwood, he doesn't care," then a laugh, a low, harsh laugh that was so unlike herself it made her husband groan aloud.

The doctor came softly in.

"Her pure young life is having a hard battle, but it will conquer, please God," he said, with such quiet confidence that Elwood took hope.

"Mrs. Price is waiting for you now, and you must eat, Mr. Everson; you want the strength for two men—for the husband and the mill master."

Doctor Gregory went with him to the door, speaking cheerfully.

"But you, doctor?"

"Oh, I have had my supper, and my smoke. Now I am all right for the night."

He closed the door, standing outside a moment to speak more distinctly.

"I can have an excellent nurse here, Everson at any moment, if you prefer; but I shall be here much of the time anyhow, and Mrs. Price is like a mother; talk it over with her, if you will."

He went in again and Mrs. Price came up to ask Elwood to the dining room, where her husband was waiting.

"There is a hamper of provisions all ready for your men, Everson; my wife understands how to

do that sort of thing ; now, we can take it over, or I can send it, if you conclude not to go back."

" Yes, I must go back, by and by. I thank you very much, Mrs. Price, for your thoughtfulness. I fear you will begin to think me a very troublesome individual."

He wondered if they censured him, as the cause of his wife's trouble. It was very little matter if they did, if that wife only recovered her health and strength ; and in any case, he felt that this clergyman and his wife were true and loyal friends.

He would not allow Doctor Price to return to the mill, as he spoke of doing, but insisted on his trying to get some rest and sleep ; so the doctor's boy was sent with the hamper to the mill, and Mr. Everson said he would walk over himself later.

An hour or two passed quickly, where there was so much to speak of and such anxiety to do, though there was really very little that could be done for the sufferer who held so large a share in all their thoughts and affections.

Then, as the clock struck a late hour, some one asked, " Have you seen the doctor's boy since he came back ? "

" Has he come back ? He ought to have reported."

But, upon search, it was found that the boy had not returned.

"Then there is something wrong," said Mr. Everson calmly, rising to put on his overcoat.

They wondered at him, he seemed so quiet, not rushing about, as many another man would have done, nor creating any disturbance in any way, not even appearing to be in much haste, though the occasion was evidently an urgent one.

He went again to his wife's room, before starting out. She had slept a little, under the influence of an opiate, and was, perhaps, a trifle more quiet; but oh, he thought he would give anything if he could only see the clear light of reason in those glittering eyes.

During those few hours matters had been very lively at the mill.

"Let us have precious little light," said Aleck Jones, as they began to plan, after the gentlemen had gone, "and then we can see what those fellows are about. I think I'll get a place here at this low-down window, where I can keep an eye on that man Brett; and one or two of you will stay pretty close, so that I can speak with you without being heard outside in case of his coming up."

Their movements were all quiet, and they divided up, so as to keep watch on all sides.

One or two of them stretched themselves on the floor, close to Aleck, whose keen eyes were eagerly fixed on the spot where he could discern Brett's slouching figure going to and fro in front of his men.

Half an hour passed, and then Aleck raised himself slightly, as if his attention had been attracted.

"The snake's creeping up!" he announced in a low tone.

Brett was indeed "creeping up," and another man just behind him.

They came gradually under the shadow of the building, and seemed to be searching for something. Aleck's ear was pressed close to the window crack, but neither sight nor sound told where the men inside the mill were.

"The thing has gone out—just my luck! Give me a match," whispered Brett.

Without a word or sound of warning, Aleck sprang through the low window and caught the man by the throat.

"Is it a match you want? Let me show you it then!"

Brett had his match truly, for though he tugged and fought fiercely, he could not free himself from

the other's powerful grasp. His companion ran, and before the others could come up, Jones had the man inside the mill, and the window shut again.

"Now, boys, we'll fix this one, and then attend to the other matters," for Aleck was fearful lest the fire might have started somewhere.

"A nice way to take advantage of the master's generosity," said Aleck, as he tied the man fast and pinioned his arms. "Now, you can have a little time for meditation ; and look here, fellow, if you don't quit that swearing, I'll gag you, sure,' which threat had its desired effect.

At this moment, the doctor's boy came up by a side road, and he discovered the fire, which had caught in another place. He heard Aleck's voice inside, and called to him. Then, indeed, it was hard work which the men had to do, fighting the fire, keeping watch of the building, lest the men should get in and liberate their leader, and battling with the fellows who from time to time attacked them.

"Shall we ring the bell ?" asked one of the men, for they all followed Aleck's guidance willingly.

"Not yet ; we won't trouble the master if we can help it. 'Twould be a good thing if we could settle these fellows for him !"

So they worked with a will, and the first thing which yielded was the fire; apparently they had made all secure from that.

"What next?" demanded one.

"Here's your supper that the master sent you," said the doctor's lad, displaying sundry tempting things to the exhausted men.

"Hallo! Just set the table, will you, while I hang a few of these fellows?" but though Aleck was so gay in spirit, he had some bad bruises and burns, and felt quite tired out.

"If the master comes back, he'll send for the officers, I suppose," he said, striking away at one and another, who could not bear to give in, above all to this man Jones, but finding that there was no hope of releasing their leader, the men gradually dropped away, and left him to his fate. The bond between them was not firm enough to hold when self-interest pulled strongly in an opposite direction.

"Better take the first train, and get out of the way," called Aleck. "I think I see the master a-coming down the hill!"

They saw, too, and the last few defiant ones disappeared.

"Fling open the doors to welcome the master," shouted Aleck, who, in his effort to bear up under

the pain and exhaustion he was feeling, grew more hilarious than was his custom.

Elwood scented the fire, as he drew near, and that aroused him. He hastened up wondering why the men stood so quietly, with that smell of fire about them

"Don't you know there is fire, my men? Where is it?"

"We have put it out, sir, and all is right now."

"And you haven't eaten?" he asked, noticing the appearance of things, and then, "Why, what is this, Brett?" as his eyes fell upon the man who lay bound in a corner.

"Tell the master about it, boys," said Aleck, whose face and voice drew attention to himself.

The foreman also appeared at that moment, and Elwood sent for his own horse and buggy to convey Aleck home. He had the whole story, by the time it arrived, and took the reins himself, to take the brave man home, while the others ate what they so much needed.

Turning his head to look at Brett, as he was helped out on the arm of a comrade, Aleck said, "Take good care of him, boys!"

"Aye, trust us!"

When Mr. Everson had put him safely into the wife's hands, and thanked him with warm words

for his faithful services, the man's face grew serious. He looked up to Elwood, and said, "Master, once your beautiful lady knelt at my side and said 'Our Father,' 'because,' said she—counting me a brother alongside of herself—'we both need a Father's help;' and so it was just her prayer that helped me to-night, and saved the mill. I heard it all the while I was working to get that fire out—'Our Father,' in the lady's soft words."

Elwood was deeply moved. He could only grasp his workman's hand, and say, "Pray for her now, my friend, for she lies very ill."

The gray dawn was growing across the hill-tops, when the foreman dismissed his men, giving them a holiday, at the master's desire, and the wherewith to enjoy it.

They, however, agreed among themselves—and Mr. Hopson approved—to divide into detachments, to stay at the mill by turns.

"For," said they, "the master is too good and generous to be suspicious. He has taken the 'word of honor' of that fellow who has no honor about him; and who knows?"

Yet in their secret hearts they were each one of them well-pleased with "the master's" generous decision.

XXXVI.

MR. SHERWOOD, I see it all now, when it may be too late! Oh, why is it always so? Why do we only find out our blunders and our failings when it is too late?"

"'Knowledge by suffering entereth,' Miss Grace; that is our human lot. It was through suffering—such as we can never faintly realize—that our Master took upon Him the knowledge of our poor weak human nature; so that all suffering is henceforth sanctified if it but lead us nearer to Him. Then too your knowledge may not be too late, as you say. Mrs. Everson is very young, she may recover."

"So young! yes, that is just it; a mere child, as mother says, and yet we had no patience with her; never showed her, by our lives, what a good thing was the Church we loved so."

"Oh, Miss Grace, are you not too hard in your self-judgment? How is your mother to-day?"

"Not at all well. Will you come in to see her? She is wearing out under this anxiety. Elwood has always been so much to her, and she cannot bear that he should suffer."

The young clergyman sighed as he entered the house with Grace. He was learning to feel his own weakness—and therein lay his future strength—he saw how poorly he filled the place of the aged rector to the mother of this family; he knew quite well that she could not speak with him and confide in him as she had done with Doctor Dorman; he knew that she missed the old clergyman; yet she always received Mr. Sherwood kindly, and listened to all that he had to say.

He did not say much in those days; he felt that he, too, might have done better for young Mrs. Everson. He might, as Grace had said, have helped to lead her to the Church by a more quiet and unostentatious showing of its pleasant ways; he might have talked less, in his bantering, laughing style, which, to an earnest person, is always unseemly and offensive.

Over the once happy and united household hung a heavy cloud. They were in daily receipt of a dispatch from Elwood, but thus far no hopeful news had been given them.

"All good and pleasant things are so held in

abeyance by this one trouble," said Jessie, somewhat complainingly ; yet she too had her secret conviction that she had not been wholly blameless with regard to her brother's wife.

Mr. Allan Brewster had announced himself as now quite ready and anxious to be married, but of course it could not be, Jessie said, until some different and definite news came from Elwood. So she was still the same restless, dissatisfied woman; a trifle wiser, as any good woman must be through a conviction of her mistakes. Grace and Rica could afford to wait for their happiness, they were younger, she said ; yet she and Allan managed to get a good deal of happiness out of those days of waiting.

Rica had longed to go to her sister-in-law, but she knew she ought not to leave her mother ; besides, Sylvie had gone as soon as they had let her know of the danger ; perhaps one more would only be in the way, and comfort nobody but herself. So she waited at home, and was a sweet stronghold of comfort and rest and hope, both to her mother and to Malcolm De Lancey, whose young life might perhaps in those days have lost its aim and courage had it not been for the upholding love of this pure, true woman.

. . . . . .

"When she awakes, I hope—I think she will know you." Doctor Gregory spoke cautiously, for he recognized the feverish dread, the longing, the anxiety in Elwood Everson's worn face.

"There will be nothing to do, except to talk yourself, and not to let her talk much," he added, in his blunt way; and then he went out.

To Mrs. Price he reiterated the caution, "Do not let her talk much," then turning back and hesitating slightly, he added, "Mrs. Price, she must not go home at all this summer."

"No, doctor; certainly not. I shall keep her here, until some other place will be better for her."

He nodded his head then, as if he felt quite satisfied, and went off.

How calmly she slept! Not a trace of that restlessness; no more twitching of the lips; not a groan, or a murmur; only the quiet, regular breath.

How thankful he was! He knelt down and prayed in his heart, uttering the words of the Thanksgiving for a Recovery from Sickness.

Then he sat patiently waiting, his thoughts full of sweet, happy remembrances.

One hour—two,—since Doctor Gregory left her, and she had not moved.

He stepped softly to the bed, and looked; he had scarcely dared to look long, before; he had felt, had hoped, that there might be a magnetism in his gaze which would disturb her; but now he gazed on; and suddenly, without any warning of motion or of breath, she opened her eyes and looked directly into his—her own sweet, clear, loving eyes again. How could he bear the happiness! He just stood and gazed, but he did not know how his face was transfigured with joy and gratitude.

She smiled at him, and said feebly, "Elwood, dear husband," and he knelt close, folding her in his arms, and kissing her with love's tenderest kisses.

She seemed very weak, scarcely able to speak, but she looked at him with a great joy in her face.

At last she said, almost in a whisper, "Have I been ill, Elwood?"

"Yes, darling, but now you are better. This is the beginning; only you are to let me do the talking."

She smiled, as if that indeed were an easy matter just then. She seemed to be thinking, trying to recall something.

He was watching eagerly, not knowing whether

he ought to speak, when she looked up again, a little dimness of happy tears in her eyes.

"Elwood, the Thanksgiving for a Recovery, will you say it for me, dear?"

How his heart throbbed! Could he command his voice? He took her little Prayer Book, over which he had shed many manly tears during those last days.

"Darling, which one?" he asked, hesitating, yet forgetting that she had not known the Prayer Book as well as he.

"The one in 'the Visitation,'" she answered feebly.

When he had said it, broken with sobs at each sentence, she uttered a soft "amen," and closing her eyes, slept again—this time with her hand in her husband's.

And all the time he sat there, he wondered and rejoiced at her knowledge of the Prayer Book, and her evident longing for its words of comfort.

Doctor Price had told him nothing directly; he had often spoken of such and such a service at which Mrs. Everson had been present, but only in a casual way; the deeper, fuller telling he left for the wife herself.

Doctor Gregory came in while Elwood sat there

holding his wife's hand; he smiled. "I see," he said, "it is all right."

He thought he had never seen any such joy on a man's face. He placed a glass, with its contents to be given when Mrs. Everson awoke again, on a table by the bed, and went out nodding his head emphatically, and saying to himself, "It's always so, the strongest, truest men are those held fast by a woman's gentle hand!"

Elwood called Sylvie, who had given place wholly to him, and told her she must be there when Gertrude awoke again.

"But no one else, mind!" said Doctor Gregory, positively. "Not even this little Prince, who is such a brave fellow that he can keep as still as a mouse, and then he carried "Prince" off for a long ride, which was a wonderful treat to the city boy.

Gertrude's recovery progressed in a very encouraging manner; she spoke very little during the first few days, seeming quite contented to lie and watch the faces of the dear ones who had come to her; she did not ask how or why, she only knew that they were there, and took comfort in the knowledge.

As she gained in strength, and they began to realize that she would wish to talk, they generously tried to give place one to the other.

"It is you whom she will want to speak with most, Elwood," Sylvie would say.

"I don't know, Sylvie; you are her only sister, and she naturally will want to confide in you."

But Sylvie often made solicitude for "Prince" an excuse for her absence, although he really did not need her, for he was wonderfully happy in the attentions of the doctor and of the clergyman and his wife.

"What day is it, Elwood?" asked his wife one bright morning, as she sat looking at the sunlight falling through the vines which clambered to her window.

"Almost the middle of May, dear. To-day is the fourteenth."

"I have been ill a long time. How kind, how very good, Doctor Price and his wife are!"

"Indeed they are, my darling, and they love you like their own child; they told me so."

Tears filled her eyes. Presently she said, "My husband, I want to tell you something.

He raised her gently, so that she could rest in his arms; then he said, very tenderly, "Darling, it must not be a word about the past; that is over and gone; about our happy present, or our glad, good future let it be."

"But Elwood dear, can you trust me, so?" she asked brokenly.

. . . . . .

"Doctor Price told me that the ground had to be prepared for the seed; I think he was right; I have learned so much—and, Elwood, I want to be confirmed. I wonder if I could get out to church by Ascension Day."

"I am afraid not, my darling; it is quite near, you know; we will ask Doctor Gregory; I hear his step, now."

The doctor said no; if she grew strong, and ate well, and sat up for a few previous days, she might go out for a ride on that day, or about that time; but not to church; and he looked as if he regarded the very idea as preposterous.

In the meantime, Elwood, happy man, had his head full of plans; He would find a house near their friends, which he could rent for the summer, and if his mother and sisters would come there to keep it for them, Gertrude not only could grow well and strong, but they could all enjoy the air of the hills and the quiet beauty of the retired place.

It turned out somewhat differently, yet very pleasantly to all concerned. Sylvie and Stewart took the house, and the others came as they

pleased and stayed with them ; and during that happy summer, Elwood carried out his intention of building a little country home for Gertrude and himself. He had found in his daily walks how his wife had endeared herself to the humble mill people, and he knew that the blessed understanding of the Church and the reaching to the Master through each of its days and services which had been given her there, made the place doubly dear to her heart.

She grew well very fast after that first ride, so that Doctor Gregory said she might attend service on Whitsunday if the weather were favorable.

Doctor Price wrote to the Bishop, who felt a sort of pet pride and affection for this parish among the hills, and told him that he had two candidates who had not been fully prepared at the last visitation. So the good man arranged his plans, and went to the Church at H—— on the morning of Whitsunday.

It was a touching sight to all the congregation, and it made the occasion doubly affecting to Mrs. Everson—just the two, man and woman, beauty and strength, going side by side, up to the chancel to receive strengthening grace of the Holy Spirit, "through prayer and the laying on of hands." Aleck Jones and the "master's lady," the strong,

stalwart man, and the fair, girlish woman; both alike needed that defending grace, and both, as little children, knelt to receive it. The face of Aleck's wife was tremulous with joyful emotion; it seemed to her it was the happiest day of her life.

Generous-hearted Sylvie! Staunch Presbyterian though she was, she had not one pang of regret, rather did she rejoice with her whole heart to know that Gertrude was now of her husband's Church—one with him in all things.

The children had been wild with joy, at the rector's permission to decorate the Church for the Whitsun Feast; to be sure their thought was more of the dear lady who would come for the first time since her sickness, yet it was not a thought which could interfere.

The chancel and font were glorified with the whiteness; willing hands had undertaken the arrangement of the flowers for the children, and the effect was beautiful. In Mrs. Everson's pew lay a lovely bouquet, prepared expressly by the old florist whose humble home had been gladdened often by Gertrude's presence.

As the Bishop's hands rested upon the wife's head, suddenly a voice seemed to repeat to her the Master's own words—"And whosesoever sins ye

remit, they are remitted unto them." They seemed to rise before her, that long company of holy men, reaching back to the Apostles and their Lord, the Head of His Church; and through their hands, from His, passed that power of blessing and forgiveness, like a pure chain of gold, shining with the deathless glory of His love!

She felt the burden lifted. It was as if the Christ Himself had spoken to her—using that at which she had scoffed and against which she had rebelled, to bless her most abundantly—bidding her welcome to His Church, His own household, redeemed and guarded forever by Himself; for "Lo," said He to those whom He sent, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00025670346